

**DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES, STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
AND STUDENT ENROLLMENT DECISIONS IN SELECTED PRIVATE
UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA**

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Requirements for the Award of the Master Degree in Business Administration
(Marketing Option) of Tharaka University**

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DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for an award of a diploma or conferment of degree in any other university.

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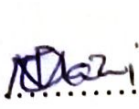
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RECOMMENDATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my family, whose love, patience, and unwavering faith in me made this achievement possible.

To the Almighty, for His endless grace, guidance, and protection throughout this journey.

To my friends, for their constant encouragement, support, and understanding during difficult times.

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ABSTRACT

The recent Kenya National Bureau of Statistics report shows that private universities have been experiencing a significant drop in student enrollment rates since 2022. This pattern threatens the sustainability of private universities, since they rely on student admission rates. In response, these institutions leverage the power of digital media to attract learners. A review of the contemporary literature showed that digital marketing, including email, influencers, social media, SEO, and email marketing influence decision-making among the target audiences. This study's main objective was to examine how digital marketing influence university enrollment decisions in private universities in Kenya. The specific objectives were to assess the influence of social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and influencer marketing on student enrollment decisions, hinging on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Engagement Theory and Social Influence Theory. The study employed a survey research design to collect and analyze primary data from current students in the three private universities in Kenya. Structured questionnaires were distributed across a sample of 382 students (n=382) drawn from the current 96,640 private university students consistently with Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling method. The data was imported in MS Excel format and analyzed for descriptive, correlation and regression using SPSS V.29. A Pearson correlation analysis established that each factor has positively and significantly associated with private university enrollment. Bivariate and multivariate regression analyses found that social media, influencer and SEO marketing influenced the student decisions to enroll in private universities. The influence was positive and statistically significant. Also, the multivariate regression analysis showed that these variables predicted university enrollment decisions jointly. The study also found that student characteristics moderated the link between digital marketing and university enrollment in both bivariate and multivariate regression analyses. Based on these findings, the research concluded that digital marketing has a positive influence on private university enrollment decisions. The study recommended that future research should assess other factors that influence student enrollment decisions, as digital marketing explained only 62.7% of the change in decision making among learners.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CUE	Commission for University Education
D.V	Dependent Variable
EU	European Union
I.V	Independent Variable
IIUM	International Islamic University of Malaysia
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
M.V	Moderating Variable
MKU	Mount Kenya University
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programs
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TPB	Theory of Planned Behavior
USIU	United States International University

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Student admission rate directly influences a university's financial health, reputation, program, service sustainability and expansion. This is because the tuition fees paid by enrolled students serve as the primary revenue source for these institutions. A high enrollment rate guarantees the institutions' revenue, effective maintenance and expansion of academic programs, campus facilities, and services (Mahajan & Golahit, 2017). A high student enrollment also signals a rising demand for its academic programs, which, in turn, boosts the institution's reputation and standing in national and global rankings. A university with a consistently high enrollment rate is often perceived as a more desirable place to study (Biswas, 2020). Low program registration can be a precursor for course cancellations, faculty cuts, or the discontinuation of academic program (Phillips & Jones, 2024). Consequently, universities constantly devise strategies that support high enrollment to achieve sound financial health, academic strength, and long-term viability.

In Kenya, student enrollment in universities exhibits an interesting trend. In 2023, the private university student enrollment was 20% of the aggregate university learners in the country. As of 2024, this rate grew from 450,638 to 482,586, but the students who enrolled in private universities decreased from 112,287 to 96,640, representing a decline of 14.1% (KNBS, 2024). During this period, the number of government-sponsored students in private universities reduced from 29,000 to 9,622, representing a decline of 67%.

1.2 Background to the Study

Digital marketing has effectively served as an efficient and cost-effective, data-driven strategy of responding to market dynamics worldwide. In the context of shrinking private university student enrollment, where changing student learning preferences and the proliferating alternative education pathways are reducing enrollment rates, use of digital marketing as a strategic solution to boost institution visibility, engagement, and conversion rates has escalated. With these tools, the universities can target and engage prospective learners with personalized, timely, and impactful messages to sway them to enroll (Biswas, 2020). These institutions leverage the power of various digital

marketing techniques like search engine optimization (SEO), email, social media promotion, and celebrity marketing.

The nexus between digital marketing and enrollment lies in the impact that these tools exhibit at critical points in the enrollment decision path, from awareness to application (Rabenu, & Shkoler, 2022). The influence incorporates increased institutional visibility, storytelling, community building, and experience showcasing opportunities (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022). As the dependency on digital channels for informing educational choices among institutions escalates, private universities that leverage digital marketing increase their reach and build stronger bonds with prospective students, who are their primary target audiences. Thus, digital marketing serves a promotional tool and a strategic enrollment management function, shaping institutional perception, addressing information gaps, and nurturing prospective students decision-making process.

Digital marketing strategies serve as crucial tools for increasing students' enrollment in educational institutions locally and globally (Khan, 2024). Universities tailor the use of these tools to local preferences, cultures, and technologies (Wijaya, Andri & Rachmawati, 2023). In Europe, universities use region-specific search engines for organic reach, while in the USA, search engine optimization (SEO) strategies and Google ads target a diverse audience (Ben-David, 2017). In Asia, content is customized to local languages, and in South America (Mexico, Argentina, Brazil), Spanish and Portuguese languages are used to connect with broader populations (Nelson & Paek, 2007). Unique keywords are designed to capture relevant searches, while high-quality content like blogs, case studies, and alumni success stories serve as crucial trust-building measures and address students' needs (Shoukry, 2025). These strategies ensure that there is effective engagement with prospective students in different regions in various topics.

In Africa, internet access and mobile penetration have increased significantly, encouraging adoption of various digital marketing strategies by various universities to reach students across various locations (Harle et al., 2021). In south Africa, private university enrollment rate has been proliferating over the last decade. The COVID-19 period saw a remarkable escalation of this increase. Today, only 18% of the university students total are enrolled in private universities (Mhlanga, 2021). Boadu's (2023)

study also shows that Ghana's private university enrollment has declined due to a remarkable increase in demand for higher education, and high skilled human resources demand projections in the country.

Kenyan universities invest in Instagram, , Facebook, and LinkedIn promotions to share content about student success, campus events, and academic achievements. Others consider paid ads (Google, Facebook), reviews, and SEO to enhance online visibility and make it easier for prospective students to find information on courses, fees, and admission requirements (Iddris, 2018). Email marketing is also used by universities that prefer sending personalized updates to their target audience. The universities that consider popularizing themselves using virtual campus tours use video marketing and influencers.

1.2.1 Digital Marketing Strategies

According to Murti et al. (2023) digital marketing entails use of internet, mobile devices and digital platforms to promote a brand, product, service, or business. Today, Facebook, X, Instagram, and WhatsApp are popular channels for reaching out to target audiences. Learning institutions seeking effective promotional engagement with their audiences leverage the power of these tools (Barus, 2023). Other institutions consider Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to increase their brand visibility (Iddris, 2018). Visuals and videos on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram showcase important university attributes, giving the prospective students a virtual feel of the institution.

Leveraging on paid Google and social media marketing, targeting keywords related to higher education searches, is rising to engage visitors and encourage application completion or inquiries (Barus, 2023). Video marketing, including live-streamed campus tours, testimonials from students and alumni, and webinars, allows institutions to reach students who cannot visit in person (Iddris, 2018). Posting the visuals and videos of campus events, and success stories on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram gives life to the online promotions. Collaborations with local influencers to promote the university builds brand credibility. A significant number of universities consider email marketing to promote their brand (Kimani, 2024). Targeted emails offer tailored information about the benefits of enrollment like programs, deadlines, scholarships, and campus life to students.

This research was limited to three private universities' use of social media, SEO, and influencers to engage and interact with prospective students. Student enrollment rates were assessed by assessing students who consider these universities their preferred choices, considering their underlying characteristics, like the level of study, gender, and social background (Martin. 2012). Focus was on Mount Kenya University (MKU), Catholic, and Daystar universities, whose enrollments are relatively higher compared to other private universities (KNBS, 2024). The study also examined the influence of characteristics on their access to promotional information from digital marketing tools and its effect on student decision-making.

1.2.2 Student Characteristics

A moderator refers to a factor that influence the relationship between the predictor and an outcome. In this case, the predictors are private universities' digital marketing strategies while the outcome is the decision-making. Demographics like age, residence, level of income, and educational background can impact how digital marketing resonates with prospective students (Adeyanju et al., 2019). For example, Kisirkoi and Kamanga's (2022) study in Kenya revealed that rural residency and limited or unreliable internet access could limit access to online educational content during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, students from low-income backgrounds often have less access to digital resources like smartphones and the Internet, hindering their ability to act on marketing messages, such as applying for scholarships or completing applications. Head et al. (2020) show that students with such challenges may struggle to consume content and engage with online campaigns. Additionally, and poorly optimized websites and web ads may undermine efforts to engaged students

1.2.3 Student Enrollment Decisions

According to Othman et al. (2019), enrollment decisions refer to the act of choosing to get admitted to a university after thinking about the available options. University enrollment trends vary across regions and are influenced by economic, demographic, governmental, and societal factors. Loyalka et al. (2021) show that in Asia, China and India have witnessed a significant growth due to investments in higher education, especially the medicine, engineering, and technology. Other countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore also exhibit similar growth (Altbach et al., 2019). In Europe, enrollment rates are generally high. Many students across the world have

made the UK their top learning destination. The region has experienced a rapid influx of international students from China, India, and Nigeria following adoption of initiatives like the EU's Bologna Process promote university mobility (Teichler, 2023). Germany attracts students by offering low-cost or free education. The USA and Canada continue to see rising enrollments, bolstered by their global reputation for quality education (Bevis, 2024). In South America, countries like Argentina provide free public university education, leading to increasing enrollments in various learning institutions across the region.

Regionally, university enrollment has grown steadily in recent years (KNBS, 2024). Africa's enrollment rate in higher learning institutions has tripled over the past 20 years. Mbithi et al. (2021) state that as of 2020, approximately 9 million students were enrolled in universities across Africa, up from just 3 million in 2000. In North Africa, countries like Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco are leading in university enrollment rates, with many countries achieving a rate close to or above 40% (Meyer et al., 2023). In sub-Saharan Africa, countries like Nigeria and Ghana university enrollment rates are high. That said, Amin and Ntembe (2021) state that in many Central and West African countries, university enrollment rates remain low due to political instability, financial resource constraints, poor infrastructure, and a lack of educational institutions.

Locally, Kenya has seen a steady increase in university enrollment, driven by both a growing population and government efforts to broaden higher education access. Recent data shows that Kenya's public universities enrolled more than 500,000 students, with private universities enrolling an additional 100,000 students (KNBS, 2024). The increased admissions are attributed to the in the 1990s SAPs, which led to the notable shift towards increasing university intake and the establishment of new public universities and private institutions (Okuro, 2024). The other factor contributing to this trend is the demographic structure. Precisely, the country's population is primarily youthful, with 75% being under the age of 35, burgeoning higher education demand (KNBS, 2024). Every year, thousands of these youngsters' graduate from high school and are qualified for university entry.

1.2.4 Private Universities in Kenya

Prior to independence, higher education was largely reserved for the elite. Only the University of Nairobi (formerly the Royal Technical College of East Africa) offered advanced education. Missionary institutions and private organizations could not offer full academic degree programs. They primarily served as centers for vocational and professional training (Okuro, 2024). In 1956, the University College of East Africa was established and later renamed the University of Nairobi in 1970, becoming the first university in Kenya.

In the 1990s, several factors contributed to the rise of private universities. These included population growth, limited capacity in public universities, and increased demand for higher education. Economic liberalization and globalization further spurred the growth of private institutions as the economy opened up to more private-sector involvement (Ferrand, 2019). Key policy changes, like the Universities Act of 1985 and 1992, established the legal framework for private universities like University of East Africa Baraton to be formally recognized and registered by the Kenyan government (Owiti, Juma & Ronoh, 2024). These events saw a significant increase in private universities throughout the 1990s and 2000s, fueled by investments from local and foreign entrepreneurs, religious organizations, and development partners. Toromo (2025) shows that the first private universities that are established at that time included Strathmore University, Daystar University, United States International University, and African Nazarene University.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Digital marketing is transforming product and service promotion rapidly, enabling institutions and organizations improve their brand visibility and value (Murti et al., 2023; Tolstoy et al., 2022). For universities, these tools are enhancing institutional image to boost student attraction (Rutendo & Lyu, 2020). The academic programs which public and private universities offer are significantly similar but the latter is experiencing a rapid decline in student enrollment (Otieno, 2023). KNBS (2024)'s report shows that private university student enrollment rate has declined by 67%, currently standing at 14% of the cumulative university student enrollment in Kenya. This pattern is linked to the dipping government funding for private university students, public university entry cluster point reduction, public university capacity expansion and

a growing preference for technical and vocational education training (TVET) institutions (Otieno, 2023). This enrollment patterns threatens private university sustainability, which hinges on student numbers (Mahajan & Golahit, 2017). Like other businesses, intensive marketing through digital media serves as a vital reversal tool for the enrollment pattern being witnessed in private university landscape in Kenya (Maayah, 2024). The influence of digital marketing strategies as private learning institution enrollment enhancer has been extensively studied by scholars like Labausa, Pinca, and Cruda (2023), Maayah (2024), Kusumawati (2019), Mahajan and Golahit (2017), Biswas (2020), Phillips and Jones (2024), Bungai et al. (2024), Harini et al. (2023), and Down et al. (2024), Mathiaka (2023) and Wanjiku and Obuba (2023). At the same time, Kisirkoi and Kamanga (2022) show that access to internet can influence the online content access and utilization, illuminating the influence of personal characteristics on the impact of digital marketing strategies. However, no study comprehensively assesses the unique influence of social media, influencer and SEO marketing on student enrollment decisions among prospective private university students in Kenya. This presents in a conceptual gap in this subject as there is no models that applies this approach to exemplify private university students' response to digital marketing messages encouraging them to enroll. With this gap in mind, the relationship between digital marketing strategies and student enrollment decisions becomes unclear. This research sought to address this gap by examining the influence of social media, influencer marketing, and SEO on student enrollment decisions in private universities in Kenya. The study also investigated how student characteristics moderated of the link between the three marketing strategies on prospective students' decisions to enroll in private universities in Kenya.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The research aimed to examine how digital marketing strategies influence student enrollment decisions in private universities in Kenya.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

- i. To evaluate the effect of social media marketing on student enrollment decisions to enroll in chosen private universities in Kenya.
- ii. To assess how influencer marketing influences on student enrollment decisions to enroll in selected private universities in Kenya.

- iii. To investigate the effect of SEO strategies on student enrollment decisions to enroll in selected private universities in Kenya.
- iv. To determine the moderating effect of student characteristics on marketing and student decisions to enroll in selected private universities in Kenya.

1.4.2. Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses that were derived from each of these objectives were as follows;

H₀₁: Social media marketing does not have a statistically significant effect on student decisions in selected private universities in Kenya.

H₀₂: Influencer marketing does not have a statistically significant effect on student enrollment decisions in selected private universities in Kenya.

H₀₃: SEO marketing does not have a statistically significant effect on student enrollment decisions in selected private Universities in Kenya.

H₀₄: Student characteristics have no statistically significant moderating effect on digital marketing strategies' effect on student enrollment decisions in selected private universities in Kenya.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Digital marketing professionals including consultants, SEO specialists and content creators may use this research's outcomes to comprehend the content that best reverberates with prospective students, enabling them refine their marketing approaches to serve their university clients better. It may also enhance the university enrollment campaigns.

For government and regulatory bodies, the research may generate crucial decision-making insights on best marketing techniques and tools for universities seeking to attract higher education students, inspiring formulation of policies that can help to boost education access and equity (Smith et al., 2017). In addition, the study's pursuit of understanding prospective students' behaviors may help target underrepresented groups and guide the development of policies that ensure more efficient use of resources, fostering an equitable education system.

Private university management is tasked with utilizing the available tools and techniques to enhance student enrollment. The current research may empower these

bodies to decide on the best ways to refine marketing strategies for these learning institutions, better target prospective students, and optimize resources to improve enrollment (Tan et al., 2024). By aligning strategies with institutional goals, management may achieve the projected institutional growth, diversity, and long-term sustainability in an evolving educational landscape.

For the commission of university education (CUE), this study may provide evidence-based insights into digital marketing strategies among private universities in Kenya to attract students and determine the most influenced groups and the ones which are being excluded indirectly to identify digital divide issues and set or revise guidelines for responsible digital marketing in higher education.

This study may enable university councils monitor and evaluate the impact of their marketing on enrollment trends and redesign the digital marketing strategies align with the university's mission and values for effective long-term brand positioning of their institutions to maximize student admission.

The findings may help the ministry of education to identify whether the current digital marketing campaigns by private universities are contributing to equity gaps and shape guidelines or support programs that ensure equality in access to university information

Prospective students may use the insights of this research to understand the marketing options, navigate the marketing landscape, and be more decisive about their educational paths. Academia is primarily concerned with bridging the current knowledge gaps and developing new knowledge.

This research's findings may bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering both academic and real-world skills to researchers. As a result, the study findings may serve as a tool for improving studies on student admissions through innovative marketing strategies.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study's main theme was digital marketing utilization to influence university enrollment decisions. The specific digital marketing strategies being investigated were social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn, email, and online advertisements like Google Ads and YouTube, influencer marketing, and SEO. The

consideration of these digital marketing strategies was hinged on their high popularity among individual and institutional marketers (Wijaya et al., 2023). The study also examined how student characteristics affects the chosen variable relationships.

Based on geography, this study used primary data obtained from Machakos (for Daystar University), Nairobi (for Catholic University) and Kiambu (for MKU) campuses in Kenya. The choice of the universities was hinged on their composition of approximately 60% of the private university enrollment of Kenya's total private university student population as (Commission for University Education, 2024). By duration, the data was cross-sectional, capturing the relevant views of the students who were enrolled in these institutions latest by 2024.

Concerning methodology, this research used a survey explanatory to obtain qualitative data from a sample of 382 students to test the research hypotheses. Proportionate sampling was employed in the allotment of sample sizes to each university. After this, the study used simple random sampling to collect the data from both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The qualitative transformed to allow application of quantitative techniques like descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation and regression analysis.

1.7 Study Assumptions

The study's key assumptions focused on the application of the targeted data. This research used structured ordinal data that is converted to scale data to allow effective analysis. Thus, the study assumed that the observations are independent to each other. It also assumed that ranked dependent variables have two or more categories with a natural order with unequal but meaningful intervals (Ernst & Albers, 2017). The other assumption was that the observations are independent of each other and that each pair of outcome groups had the same lin.

1.8 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study's outcomes could be limited conceptually, methodologically and contextually. Contextually, they were limited to private universities in Kenya and may not capture the experiences of student public university students. Conceptually, they were anchored on individual reports of personal experiences of the current students from the selected universities. The reporting could be biased as it is subjective. Methodologically, the results were limited to three private universities today. Given

this narrow scope, the findings may lack generalizability to all private universities in Kenya

Contextually, geographical diversity was taken to account permitting geographical variation. Regarding the conceptual limitation, this study emphasized anonymous data collection, mitigating the potential social appeal bias significantly. Methodologically, conducting the study in universities that carry about 60% of the total private student population in Kenya. It also emphasized rigorous sampling within those universities (diverse students across programs and year levels) to enhance the depth of insight

1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

Influencer Marketing:	In the study's discourse, this encapsulates the specific influencer attributes that are recruited to market private universities and their influence on enrollment decision-making among learners
SEO Marketing:	This entails the process of customizing or optimizing the private university's website optimizations to make it easy to allocate, and friendly to navigate to enhance visitor experience and achieve credibility
Social Media Marketing:	This refers to the social media ads, videos, and testimonials that are used to market a private university and how their features influence enrollment decision-making
Student Characteristics:	The concept of student characteristics is used to refer to each student's unique traits, qualities and attributes. This research focuses demographic attributes that influence the use of consumption of digital marketing content, including ownership of digital devices, access to the internet and social media use rate of the student
Private University Enrollment	In digital marketing, this refers to how the learners decide to enroll based on their experiences with the digital marketing methods that are employed by private universities in Kenya.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the theories that explain the association between digital marketing strategies and student enrollment decisions and the moderating effects of student characteristics on these relationships are discussed in detail.

2.1.1. Engagement Theory

Engagement theory is a learning framework that emphasizes the significance of meaningful involvement and active participation in the processes of learning through collaborative and interactive pathways. The theory was created by Greg Kersley and Ben Scheiderman in 1998 (Insorio, 2024). The theory assumes that peer interaction, collaboration fosters bond building. The communication process improves with making participants (prospective students) the creators of ideas and content rather than passive consumers. Interactive activities that prompt a notion of real-world value or purpose by being active participants make this interaction generate a feeling of creating a broader societal impact.

Engagement theory is criticized for assuming that everyone prefers interacting in social setups like digital media platforms, which is not always the case, as other people may fail to interact but still make decisions (Rachmad, 2022). However, the emphasis of focusing on active, meaningful and realistic collaboration to foster decision-making make the theory highly applicable in the real-world situation where people decide better when they actively participation and feel that their causes of action have an impact in the real world (Byrne (2022)). The theory anchors this study by explaining how private universities engage students online, through immersive virtual experiences, social media and influencers to showcase the capability of private universities to solve real-world problems of students. This study posits that phenomenon serves as a key incentive for the prospective students to consider participating in online conversations and to be part of university stakeholders to have a broader societal impact. As an illustration, Goudih, Abdallah and Benraghda (2018) used this theory to investigate undergraduate student adjustment to college at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM).

2.1.2 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior, developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985, suggests that attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence people's actions (Ajzen, 2020). The main assumptions of the theory of planned behavior include that behavior originates from deliberate decision-making processes, behaviors seek to achieve specific goals or outcomes, and people's attitude toward a specific behavior influences their intention to engage in that behavior. Situational constraints, social pressure, and perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform a behavior influence engaging in specific behaviors (Rizzo & Columna, 2020). TPB is praised for its ability to predict behavior across various fields, offering flexibility, empirical support, and a comprehensive view of human actions. Then again, its critics contend that TPB overlooks the emotional aspects of decision-making, assuming that people's choices are rational and founded solely on available information. Other factors beyond the information that is presented in digital marketing can influence the enrollment decision-making processes among prospective students, harming the relevance of TPB in this research (Connor, 2020). However, in the ideal world, people's decisions to engage in a particular behavior or act are significantly influenced by how they perceive such behavior internally, and the external factors like other people's perceptions of such behavior or act. This makes the TPB model a realistic explainer of people's choices, actions and behaviors.

The theory anchors this research by projecting how the student attributes, including attitudes, norms, and control interact to influence decisions to enroll in private universities, with social media marketing at the center of shaping these interactions (Rizzo & Columna, 2020). Through the content that is shared on social media, various private universities seek to reinforce positive feelings about their strengths, including good reputation, diverse academic programs, and vibrant campus life, to prospective students (Wang et al. 2022). Prospective learners attempt to match this content with personal expectations to determine whether the universities can offer courses that meet personal career goals, which, in turns shapes how these learners make enrollment decisions. In the contemporary literature, Dewberry and Jackson (2018) used this theory to examine the intention of students to stay in universities.

2.1.3 Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory, developed by Herbert Kelman in 1958, describes how conformity, obedience, persuasion, and social pressure shape individual decisions and actions. It assumes that people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by others in their social networks, as individuals compare themselves to those they admire and align with their opinions and behaviors (Nguyen et al., 2025). It also assumes that behavioral change inspired by personal desire to match the norms or expectations even without explicit pressure, comply with requests or orders from an authority figure, a smaller group or individual can influence the majority's beliefs or behaviors, actions of others reflect correct behavior for a situation of uncertainty, and that herd-thinking or conformity within a group can lead to poor decision-making outcomes.

Social Influence theory's critics claim that it overstresses conformity and obedience while overlooking individual agency, resistance, and the impact of cultural differences (Spears, 2021). However, the theory is relevant in real-life decision-making because it is metrically proven that behavior change occurs in response to external factors, like social pressure and obedience to authority. The theory is valuable in this research, particularly in understanding how celebrity endorsements can influence prospective students' decisions to enroll in the universities they promote. As an illustration, James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) used this theory to investigate factors that predict a small institution's selection of international students.

2.2 Empirical Framework

In this section, the real-world findings related to each of the research questions are presented

2.2.1. Influence of Social Media Marketing on Student Enrollment Decisions

The findings from the studies conducted in other continents indicate that the utilization of digital marketing strategies influences student enrollment in private universities. Kusumawati (2019) used data from a public university that actively manages digital marketing to examine the induced enrollment behaviors the university by students. The findings revealed that students perceived social media's interactive and collaborative nature a balanced communication platform, allowing the opinions and experiences of students and other stakeholders views to be evenly shared. The findings of Kusumawati (2019) underscore the significance of digital marketing, especially social media in

influencing students to join universities decisions. Kusumawati (2019) contributed significantly to this research by demonstrating the positive association between the use of social media by universities and relationship creation with prospective students, which can translate to enhanced enrollments and vice versa. However, left a theoretical gap by not demonstrating how social media influences private university student enrollment decisions, justifying the current study.

Harini et al. (2023) studied marketing approaches that meet contemporary student needs, potentially impacting their enrollment decisions. The study used qualitative techniques to collect and analyze data from early childhood institutions. The study highlighted the essence of creating inclusive marketing strategies, understanding information recipient characteristics and needs, leveraging social media and online platforms, ensuring data security, highlighting and endorsing educator quality, and addressing the specific needs of students as the key subjects that enhance ECD institution visibility and appeal. Harini et al. (2023) contribute to this research by illustrating the importance of social media in enhancing university and prospective student interactions. It can be deduced that effective use of this strategy can contribute to higher enrollment and vice versa. The study also reinforces the necessity to have robust digital strategies to boost institutional interests, including increasing the rate of student enrollment . Study assessed the social media components that shape enrollment decisions and focused on early childhood institutions. This leaves both conceptual and methodological gaps, as it focuses on general marketing and fails show how social media impacts decision-making among private university students, creating a foundation for this research.

Ogeto et al. (2024) used survey data from 516 students to examine how marketing communication tools affect student enrollment in private universities in South Sudan, with a focus on social media and direct marketing techniques. In their findings, the scholars noted that radio advertising effectively reached a wide audience, while Facebook marketing influenced student admissions. Student network interactions also impacted students' university choices. Meeting customer expectations through quality services encouraged referrals, though the impacts of advertising and social media marketing were not statistically significant in influencing student enrollment. Ogeto et al. (2024) findings contribute to this research by illustrating how digital media is

impactful in decision-making among prospective students. Then again, the study focused on ECDs, leaving a gap theoretical of not demonstrating how social media influences private university student enrollment decisions. This is the gap that the current study aimed to fill.

Isaacs and Moulder (2024) studied the use of social media marketing by South African post-secondary learning institutions to recruit students, focusing on students' perceptions of its effectiveness to provide guidelines for developing social media strategies that can better influence students' decisions when selecting an institution. The study sampled consisted of Grade 11 and 12 students from schools representing the five different quintiles in South Africa. The research identified increased engagement, relationship-building, and the use of creative visual content to communicate practical information as the key guidelines. The findings underscore the influence of social media on student decision-making and the main social media promotion strategies that enhance its impact as a marketing technique to influence prospective students. Despite the insights that this study generates on the impacts of social media, it focuses on secondary school learners, leaving out the subject of the influence of social media marketing on private university student enrollment decision-making. This left a critical gap in this subject that the current study sought to fill.

Swart and Shirte (2024) investigated the significance of using effective media and marketing strategies for private higher-learning institutions to increase enrollment in South Africa. The scholars sampled 23 respondents from three relevant institutions and analyzed their data. The importance of strengthening online presence, improving the quality of websites, and engaging in high school visits and career fairs to attract a broader student base to encourage enrollment was established in the findings. The findings of Swart and Shirte (2024) contribute to this research by illuminating the importance of using digital media, including social media accordingly to enhance enrollment rates. While this study provides critical insights into this subject, its focus was South Africa. This left a an empirical gaps, as it did not include Kenya private university students, substantiating the necessity to conduct this study.

Sikalumbi and Nalumino. (2023) used data from 100 students and staff of two Zambian public universities to examine how marketing strategies are effective in boosting enrollment at public universities in Zambia. The study established that multiple marketing strategy adoption precedes student enrollment, with university websites and

social media, investing in infrastructure, developing market-driven programs, and improving customer service as the key subjects. From the findings of Sikalumbi and Nalumino. (2023), it can be inferred that implementing diverse marketing strategies enhances enrollment, which is pivotal for improving universities' financial sustainability and service quality. The findings of this research reinforce the notion that social media popularize learning institutions like private universities, enhancing the rates of enrollment . That said, the study contains both empirical and theoretical gaps. Precisely, it focused on Zambian learners. Secondly, it captured the views of both learners and staff, which could lead to biased views, especially of the staff data was dominant in the dataset. Thirdly, only 100 subjects were included in the sample, potentially leading to sampling bias. The current study sought to address by assessing the subject more comprehensively by looking at the specific social media components that shape decision-making using a larger sample that is more representative of the population.

Oluyemi (2020) surveyed the responses of parents and teachers drawn from 600 high school students to assess how social media affects teenager education in Ogun State, Nigeria. The scholar established that promotion on social media platforms facilitates both learning and interaction, which contribute to overall progress. The findings of Oluyemi (2020) contribute to this subject by shedding light on it. It suggests that social media and teenager education are mutually beneficial, but the most important of these is the contribution to the learning process of youngsters.

Mathiaka (2023) assessed how digital marketing strategies affects student enrollment at KCA University (KCA). The study's sample comprised 390 respondents. The research found that the university prioritized Facebook for institution-to-student interaction. A significant positive link was established between social media marketing and student enrollment, with regression analysis results indicating that social media marketing explained 62.8% of the variance in student enrollment. Other impactful marketing strategies were SEO and email marketing. These findings typify digital media, including social media marketing strategies' role in influencing student enrollment in private higher-learning institutions. However, these findings are unique to KCA. Despite the insights from this study, empirical and methodological gaps exist because the researcher focused on KCA university students and Facebook alone,

leaving out other private universities and social media marketing strategies. This study sought to fill this gap by looking at three digital marketing strategies and multiple private universities.

Kimani and Obwatho (2020) sampled 139 respondents and combined their information with desk review data to examine how social media marketing influences student enrollment in private universities in Kenya. The scholars established that private universities effectively employed social media platforms to enhance student enrollment and social media marketing platforms like Snapchat, Pinterest, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, and Quora aided service delivery, cost reduction, and stakeholder communication, with some preferring it as their main communication channel. The findings of Kimani and Obwatho (2020) illuminate the positive influence of social media platforms on student enrollment at private universities. Effective use of social media by private learning institutions can contribute positively to enrollment goals. That said, a conceptual gap can be established in this study as the researchers' main focus was not narrowed down to the impacts of these marketing strategies on private university student decision-making, justifying the current study.

2.2.2. Influence of Influencer Marketing on Student Enrollment Decisions

Jin et al. (2019) compared the Instagram and traditional marketing strategies' impact on source trustworthiness, brand attitude, envy, and online presence. The study found that consumers exposed to Instagram celebrities' brand posts rated the source as more trustworthy, expressed a more positive attitude toward the brand, felt a stronger social presence, and experienced greater envy compared to those exposed to traditional celebrity advertising. Social presence mediated the effects of celebrity type on trustworthiness, brand attitude, and envy. The appearance-related self-discrepancy moderated these effects, influencing how consumers perceived the celebrity and their brand endorsement. The results of Jin et al. (2019) contribute to this research by underscoring the unique influence of Instagram celebrities on consumer perceptions and emotions. The insights illuminate how effective celebrity endorsement on Instagram positively shapes the image and perception of the private university that uses it as an advertisement technique and the subsequent enrollment . Then again, the scholars leave a conceptual gap in their study for failing to demonstrate how the

influencer marketing techniques influence enrollment decision-making among private university students, creating the basis for the current research.

Reinikainen et al. (2020) explored how audience comments affect influencer marketing effectiveness. They conducted an experiment using a YouTube vlog performance and analyzed the association between comments and the behavior of the celebrities. The results revealed a parasocial link between the celebrity, their audience and the subsequent perceived credibility. The audience comment moderated this effect. Increased influencer credibility boosts brand trust and purchase intention. Reinikainen et al.'s (2020) study contributes to this research by highlighting the celebrity-audience interactions that play a critical role in shaping influencer marketing effectiveness as a promotional approach. Marketers emphasizing the impact of both the influencer's relationship with the audience and the audience's interaction through comments are likely to boost university enrollment and vice versa. Despite the insights that this study generates, the scholars leave theoretical, empirical and conceptual gaps by focusing on the interaction between comments on celebrity marketing and the resultant behavior, failing to include university learners in their experiment and not demonstrate how the influencer marketing techniques influence enrollment decision-making among private university students, necessitating conducting the current research to address these gaps.

Deepa and Giridhar (2018) examined how celebrity endorsements affect purchasing behavior, focusing on celebrity expertise, popularity, and image. The researchers analyzed primary data from 250 student respondents. The results revealed that all the chosen celebrity attributes positively impact students' buying behavior and brand perception. The study contributes to this research by demonstrating that using celebrities as endorsers significantly influences consumer purchase decisions. It also suggests that celebrities must meet the required expertise, popularity, and image criteria to enhance awareness about the client's services effectively. Private universities that emphasize the celebrity selection criteria have a higher likelihood of increasing both student intention and decisions to enroll. However, the study leaves a major conceptual gap by not demonstrating how the celebrity attributes and endorsements influence private university student enrollment decision-making, creating the foundation for this study.

Rutendo and Lyu (2020) explored how celebrity endorsements influence university students' buying behavior. The scholars utilized a phenomenological approach and case study design to survey 100 respondents. The study's findings revealed that celebrity endorsements positively influence students' decisions, decisions and perceptions of various acts. However, domestic celebrities in Zimbabwe, often associated with negative behaviors like drug abuse, were less trusted by consumers. The findings of Rutendo and Lyu (2020) confirms the power of celebrity endorsement as a marketing tool to influence student decision-making. Since the celebrity attributes matter, private universities that carefully select celebrities are likelier to enhance prospective student perceptions and, consequently, decisions to enroll. However, the study leaves a major empirical and conceptual gaps by not including Kenya students in the study and not demonstrating how the celebrity attributes and endorsements influence private university student enrollment decision-making, creating the foundation for this study.

Munyoro and Nhevere (2019) examined how celebrity endorsements affect university students' buying behavior. The study used a phenomenological approach and case study design in Zimbabwe. Data was drawn from 100 respondents through questionnaires and focus group discussions. It was established that celebrity commendations positively influence students' purchasing decisions and perceptions, boosting brand awareness and sales. However, celebrities that were considered immoral through drug abuse, had a lower impact due to consumer mistrust. The results of Munyoro and Nhevere (2019) underscore the essence of keenness on their choice of endorsers to optimize their marketing. Regarding this, private universities that carefully consider celebrity attributes are likely to reap the most in enrollment decisions. Then again, like Rutendo and Lyu(2020), this study leaves a major empirical and conceptual gaps by not including Kenya students in the study and not demonstrating how the celebrity attributes and endorsements influence private university student enrollment decision-making, creating the foundation for this study.

Onyancha (2016) assessed how celebrity testimonials affect customer loyalty for smartphone brands, examining both local and international celebrities. The research focused on how celebrity credibility and physical attractiveness affect customer loyalty. A mixed-methods approach was used, involving sampling 250 youth respondents, key informant interviews from four mobile phone companies, and three focus group

discussions. From the findings it was established that celebrity commendations boost sales, but customer loyalty is more strongly influenced by consumer experience with the brand. Onyancha's (2016) study reinforces the effect that celebrity endorsements, coupled with customer experience, can have in enhancing sales. Private universities that match endorsements with improving customer experience are likely to enroll more students and vice versa. However, by not demonstrating how the celebrity attributes and endorsements influence private university student enrollment decision-making, this study has a major conceptual gap, creating the foundation for this study.

Nyolo and Njuguna (2015) explored how celebrity endorsements impact young consumers' brand recall behavior in Kenya. The study sampled 167 youths in Nairobi County, using a multi-stage non-probability sampling method. The data was analyzed using descriptive, comparative, and predictive techniques. The findings revealed that celebrity endorsements significantly influenced brand recall among young consumers. Celebrities were found to enhance the appeal of the endorsed brand, making it more memorable and easier for consumers to recognize in a crowded market. The findings of Nyolo and Njuguna support the contemporary evidence on the association between effective celebrity endorsement and brand loyalty. Drawing from these findings, private universities that effectively use influencer marketing are likely to attract the attention of prospective students and, consequently, benefit from high enrollments and vice versa. That said, the study contains both theoretical and conceptual gaps. Theoretically, the study focuses on product recall rates. Empirically, the focus was on customers rather than students. An attempt to fill these gaps by assessing how enrollment decision-making is shaped by digital marketing lays a firm foundation for this study.

2.2. 3 Influence of SEO Marketing on Student Enrollment Decisions

Labausa et al. (2023) investigated how digital marketing strategies affect student enrollment decisions in tertiary education. The study also sought to identify strategies that are best suited for driving student admissions using survey data from 400 tertiary education students in the ten selected universities in University Belt, Manila City. The scholars found a statistically significant association between SEO-optimized content, webinar platforms, and student enrollment decisions. Labausa et al.'s (2023) study contributes to this research by showing the positive association between effective digital media use, including SEO, and student interest in higher learning institutions,

which can translate to increased enrollments and vice versa. That said, the study presents an empirical gap based on respondent choice, as its primary focus is Manila City universities. This study sought to fill this gap by examining the influence of SEO marketing on private university students in Kenya.

Maayah (2024) analyzed data from 406 parents with children in 126 schools to study how digital marketing affect enrollment decisions in private schools in Amman City. The study prioritized the use of social media, email, websites, search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM), and content marketing. In his findings, the scholar noted that the impact of these tools on enrollment decisions is statistically significant. According to the study, the parents decided that the schools should admit their children based on financial consideration, school reputation, and family factors. From these findings, it is evident that private schools regularly post diverse and engaging content on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, and effective interaction between the learning institutions and stakeholders like parents and students promotes admission rates and vice versa. However, the study contained both methodological and empirical gaps based on respondent choice, as its primary focus is Manila City universities. Methodologically, the researcher focused on both parents and learners. Empirically, the findings relate to Amman City residents. This study sought to fill the two gaps by examining the influence of SEO marketing on private university students in Kenya.

Bungai et al. (2024) examined how digital marketing shapes the learning institution's visibility and appeal. The study employed a qualitative approach, encapsulating case studies of schools with a record of successful implementation of digital marketing. Data gathered through in-depth interviews with school management, school document analysis, and social media was used to draw insights that informed the subject. The scholars established that effective institutional digital marketing calls for appropriate use of social media platforms, creating engaging and relevant content, and employing SEO to boost online visibility, partnerships with influencers, and the broader education community to boost the school's image and reputation. The findings of this research buttress the positive association between the use of digital marketing and student enrollment . At the same time, a conceptual gap existed in this research because the focus was on the influence of SEO on the university's visibility and appeal. This study

aimed to fill the gap by looking at how SEO influences enrollment decision-making among private university students in Kenya.

Wanjiku and Obuba (2023) used data from 74 respondents to assess how digital marketing strategies affect student enrollment at MKU. The analysis of the findings revealed that the features of the university's website, video marketing, social media presence and accessibility, enhanced brand awareness through display ads, and SEO significantly supported the success of the university's digital marketing strategy and student enrollment. The findings of Wanjiku & Obuba (2023) contribute to this research by accentuating the role of a private university's digital marketing approach, including website user experience, social media presence, video marketing, display ad optimization, and SEO, in increasing private university enrollment rates. However, a methodological gap existed in this research that could undermine its applicability. The scholar used data from 74 students only, and only one private university. The current study sought to address this gap by increasing the sample size and choice.

2.2.4 The Moderating Effect of Student Characteristics on the Relationship between Digital Marketing and Student Enrollment Decisions

Down et al. (2024) conducted a survey to investigate the student perceptions and the effectiveness of current enrollment initiatives, especially the reasons behind low interest in enrolling for a marketing undergraduate degree. The study found that a majority of the students preferred email and in-class presentations as the main sources of information. The findings of this research demonstrate that digital tools like email can increase interest in enrolling in higher education courses. That said, a conceptual gap exists in these findings as the scope of the student characteristics exclusively focused on student digital media preferences. This study expands this scope by looking at the moderating effect from the perspective of access to internet and digital media use habits by these students.

A study by Immelman and Roberts-Lombard (2015) on independent primary school marketing sought to devise marketing recommendations for these institutions in South Africa. The scholars analyzed questionnaire data obtained from 669 respondents distributed across 30 independent primary schools in Gauteng using exploratory, quantitative approaches, descriptive, and factor analysis. From the findings, it was established that the school selection choices depended on 29. These study's outcomes

are shed light on the factors that influence the effectiveness and relevance of digital marketing strategies, especially meeting the needs of students to influence their enrollment choices. That said, by focusing on South Africa as the region of study, primary school stakeholders as respondents and marketing recommendations as the key variable, this research contained methodological, empirical and conceptual gaps. This research seeks to fill these gaps by focusing on Kenya, private university students and enrollment decisions as the key variables.

Adeyanju et al.'s (2019) federal university undergraduate study in Nigeria examined the factors that influence students' decisions to choose a higher learning institution as their study destination. The study exemplified personal interest as the most significant predictor of students' decisions when analyzing the data collected through a structured questionnaire. Below these were parental influence, the university's reputation, ranking, and the cost of tuition fees. This study underscores the essence of communicating with stakeholders to enhance enrollment behaviors. Using digital media channels to share information that aligns with the interests of the students and their parents can enhance the enrollment rates and vice versa. However, by focusing on Nigeria, and personal interest, parental influence, the university's reputation, ranking, and the cost of tuition fees, the study ignored the key component of student characteristics that influence decision-making, creating a conceptual gap. This study sought to fill this gap by incorporating access to internet and digital media use characteristics as the key moderating components in the variable relationships.

Table 1: Research Gaps

Author	Objectives	Methodology	Findings	Type of Gap	Research Gap (Focus)
Kusumawati (2019)	Influence of social media marketing on university enrollment decisions	Qualitative research design employing survey data	Students view social media as a balanced interactive and collaborative communication platform	Contextual and conceptual gap	Demonstrating how social media influences private university student enrollment decisions
Down et al. (2024)	Prospective student disinterest in enrolling in bachelor's degree in marketing	Qualitative research design employing survey data	Failure to use appropriate digital marketing reduced interest and referral rates among students	Conceptual and methodological gaps	Showing how social media impacts decision-making among private university students in Kenya
Immelman and Roberts-Lombard (2015)	Factors to consider when marketing private primary schools	Mixed research design utilizing survey data	Marketers must emphasize at least 29 factors for the marketing to be effective	Contextual and conceptual gaps	Focusing the research on Kenya, private university students and enrollment decisions as the key variables
Adeyanju et al. (2019)	Factors that influence students' decisions to choose a higher learning institution	Qualitative research design utilizing questionnaire data	Personal interest, parental influence, the university's reputation, ranking, and tuition cost impact student decisions	Contextual and conceptual gap	Incorporating access to internet and digital media use characteristics in the Kenyan context
Rutendo and Lyu (2020)	The impact of celebrity endorsements on university students' buying behavior	Qualitative research using questionnaire and focused group discussions	Celebrity endorsements positively influence students' purchasing decisions and perceptions	Contextual and conceptual gaps	Including Kenya students in the study and demonstrating how celebrity attributes and endorsements influence private university student enrollment decision-making

Munyoro and Nhevere (2019)	The impact of celebrity endorsements on university students' buying behavior	Qualitative research using questionnaire and focused group discussions	Celebrity endorsements positively influence students' purchasing decisions and perceptions, boosting brand awareness and sales	Contextual and conceptual gaps	Including Kenya students in the study and demonstrating how celebrity attributes and endorsements influence private university student enrollment decision-making
Onyancha (2016)	The impact of celebrity endorsement on customer loyalty for smartphone brands	Mixed method using focused group discussions and student survey	Celebrity endorsements can boost sales, but customer loyalty is more strongly influenced by consumer experience with the brand	Conceptual gap	Demonstrating how celebrity attributes and endorsements influence private university student enrollment decision-making
Nyolo and Njuguna (n.d)	The impact of celebrity endorsements on young consumers' brand recall behavior in Kenya	Mixed research involving use of questionnaires to collect data	Celebrity endorsements enhance brand appeal, making it more memorable and easier for consumers to recognize in a crowded market	Theoretical, empirical and conceptual gaps	Assessing how private university enrollment decision-making is shaped by 3 digital marketing techniques
Harini et al. (2023)	Effective marketing strategies that meet contemporary needs	Qualitative research encompassing observation and note-taking	Marketing strategies must consider market characteristics and needs, leveraging social media and online platforms	Methodological and conceptual gaps	Focusing on digital marketing and showing how social media impacts decision-making among private university students
Ogeto et al. (2024)	The impact of marketing communication tools on student enrollment in private universities in South Sudan	Quantitative research employing a survey	Radio advertising effectively reached a wide audience, while Facebook marketing influenced student admissions	Theoretical gap	Demonstrating how social media influences private university student enrollment decisions

Isaacs and Moulder (2024)	Social media marketing use by South African higher education institutions to recruit students	Qualitative methodology using a multi-stage data collection and analysis	Social media can influence student decision-making if key elements are met	Empirical gap	Examining the influence of social media marketing on private university student enrollment decision-making
Sikalumbi and Nalumino (2023)	The effectiveness of marketing strategies in boosting enrollment at public universities in Zambia	Mixed research design using questionnaire data collection and analysis	University websites and social media, infrastructure, market-driven programs, and customer focus enhance enrollment	Empirical and theoretical gaps	Investigating specific social media components shaping decision-making using a larger Kenyan sample
Oluyemi (2020)	The association between social media and educational experiences among teenagers in Ogun State, Nigeria	Qualitative research using survey data	Social media use to interact and learn impacts student experiences	Conceptual, theoretical and empirical gaps	Assessing the impact of social media marketing on university selection choices among Kenyan students
Kimani and Obwatho (2020)	How social media marketing influences student enrollment in private universities in Kenya	Mixed research design	Social media platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, etc., aided service delivery, cost reduction, and communication	Conceptual gap	Narrowing down to the impacts of marketing strategies on private university student decision-making
Mathiaka (2023)	The significance of digital marketing strategies on student enrollment at KCA University	Mixed research design	Social media marketing, SEO, and email marketing explained a remarkable variance in student enrollment	Empirical and methodological gaps	Investigating multiple private universities and incorporating diverse but popular digital marketing strategies
Labausa, Pinca, and Cruda (2023)	The impact of digital marketing strategies on student enrollment decisions in tertiary education	Descriptive quantitative research with stratified random sampling	University selection and admission are influenced by webinars, SEO, mobile-friendly sites, and educational apps	Contextual gap	Examining the influence of SEO marketing on private university students in Kenya

Maayah (2024)	The influence of digital marketing tools on enrollment decisions in private schools in Amman City	Quantitative research employing survey data	Social media, email, SEO, and content marketing tools significantly impact enrollment decisions	Methodological , empirical and contextual gaps	Examining the influence of SEO marketing on private university students in Kenya
Bungai et al. (2024)	How effective digital marketing strategies enhance learning institution visibility and appeal	Qualitative approach with case studies of multiple schools	Effective use of social media, engaging content, SEO, influencer partnerships, and education community collaboration enhance visibility	Conceptual and contextual gaps	Assessing how SEO influences enrollment decision-making among private university students in Kenya
Wanjiku and Obuba (2023)	How digital marketing strategies affect student enrollment at MKU	Quantitative research employing a descriptive survey	University website, video marketing, social media presence, and SEO significantly support digital marketing success	Methodological gap	Increasing the sample size and making results replicable

2.3 Conceptual Framework

A detailed review of the theoretical and empirical literature established that the proposed digital marketing strategies are positively-linked. The relationships guided the researcher on what to expect in the findings. The conceptual framework in figure 1 below summarizes these relationships.

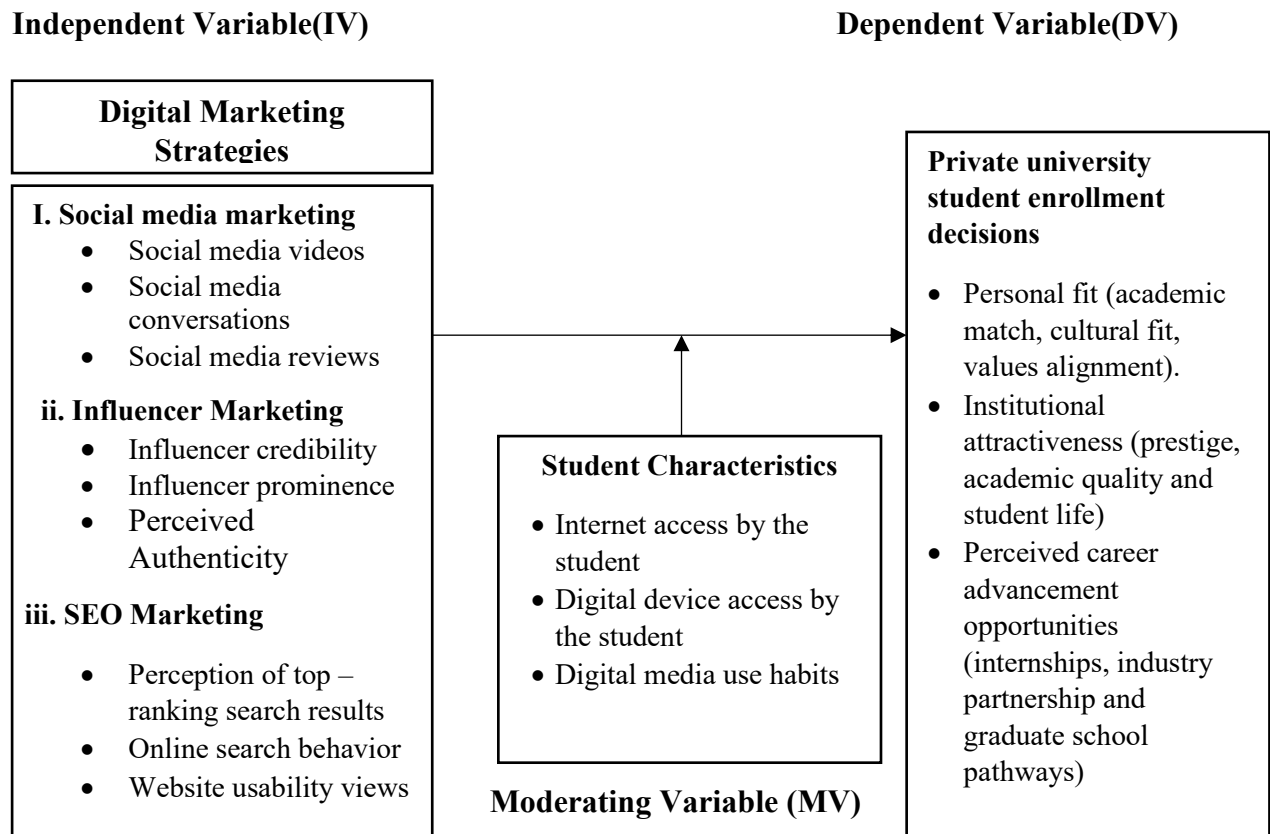


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Variable Conceptualization

Social Media Marketing

This marketing strategy was conceptualized from the lens of how the respondents relate to the choices of the media that the universities advertise themselves, the type of content they share, and interactions with prospective students on diverse social media platforms. The research looked into how social media content likes, shares, comments, retweets, and direct messaging shaped their decisions to enroll in the current university.

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing was viewed from the lens of the perceived reputation of the influencer and how he is viewed as a crucial information source. The researcher used this to evaluate the trust that the respondents have for the influencer and the positive image of the brands they promote. This was followed by an investigation of how these attributes serve as the determinants for the respondents' subsequent decisions to enroll their current university.

SEO Marketing

The study viewed SEO from the viewpoint of the strategies that universities use to improve online website visibility, navigation, traffic, user engagement, conversion rates. This was based on the notion that top ranking websites on random searches have a higher click-through and conversion rates. Considering this, the private university's website ranking in search engine results pages (SERPs) is viewed as a key opinion influencer. The researcher investigated how SERPs ranking influenced respondent decisions to enroll in the current university.

Student Characteristics

The student characteristics were conceptualized from the perspectives of access to internet, digital tools and information search and social media use preferences, access to internet before enrolling in the university.

University Enrollment Decisions

The outcome variable was looked at from the students' previous considerations to enroll based on the digital promotional techniques being used by their universities of choice depending on the institutional attractiveness, perceived personal fit and opportunity to advance one's career.

2.4 Operationalization of Research Variables

The operationalization of the research variables illustrates how the variables will be conceptualized and measured in this research.

Table 2:Operationalization of Research Variables

Type of variable	Name of Variable	Indicators
I.V	Social media marketing	a. Social media videos b. Social media conversations c. Social media reviews
I.V	Influencer Marketing	a. Influencer credibility b. Influencer prominence c. Perceived authenticity
I.V	SEO marketing	a. Perception of top –ranking search results b. Online search behavior c. Website usability views
M.V	Student characteristics	a. Internet access by the student b. Digital device access by the student c. Digital media utilization habits
D.V	University enrollment decisions	a. . Personal fit (academic match, cultural fit, values alignment). b. Institutional attractiveness (prestige, academic quality and student life) c. Perceived career advancement opportunities (internships, industry partnership and graduate school pathways)

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

3.1 Location of the Study

The study's location was Catholic University in Nairobi at 1.351111° S, 36.757778° E, Daystar University in Machakos at -1.44469° S, 37.04975° E and MKU in Kiambu county at 1.0695° S, 37.05656° E. The choice of the locations is informed by the high concentration of the selected private universities in those counties. Precisely, locations were selected based on where the campuses of the chosen universities have the student populations. The high concentration of students in these areas offers an opportunity to gather data from a diverse group, encompassing both undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as individuals from diverse backgrounds, like those for whom access to the internet may be limited. This diverse sample ensured the collection of comprehensive data, facilitating thorough analysis and robust reporting.

3.2 Research Design

The study's primary focus was how the application of digital marketing strategies affects prospective student enrollment decisions in private universities in Kenya. Brown (2022) states that the research design serves as the study's blueprint that justifies the reliability, validity, and capability of addressing the underpinning goals. This research used survey research design to conduct an in-depth, real-world examination of the selected universities (Dannels, 2018). The design entailed collection of primary data using structured questionnaires, cleaning and analyzing it to find factor connections that could help to answer the research questions.

The study emphasized qualitative data collection techniques. The quantitative techniques comprising descriptive analysis and were used to shed the picture of how each sub-sample was influenced by digital marketing (Brannen, 2017). Quantitative data primarily constituted the targeted students that actually got enrolled in the selected private universities based on gender, age bracket and study level. Quantitative data also included students who are influenced by each of the digital marketing tools based on numbers. The qualitative techniques, comprising narrative analyses, helped to describe the students' sense of impact of digital marketing on enrollment decisions based on their personal experiences (Tracy, 2024).

3.3 Population of the Study

The study's population was the private university students'. Their views of social media marketing, influencer marketing, SEO and their impacts on the decisions to enroll among the current private university students. The population of the study comprises students enrolled in private universities in Kenya. By 2024, there were 30 chartered private universities in Kenya. Three of the private universities (Daystar University, MKU, and Catholic University), which enrolled about 71.4% of the private university students, were selected as respondents.

3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A sample refers to a portion of the population that is drawn for research. Currently, there are approximately 96, 640 private university students in Kenya (Commission for University Education, 2024). Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, a study on this population required a sample of 382 respondents (Chaokromthong & Sintao, 2021). Proportionate sampling was used to allot the respondent sample sizes to each university based on populations they carry (Lohr, 2021). Data was collected by randomly distributing structured questionnaires to each university consistently with the required sample size. With $n > 30$, the sample drawn from these universities was an adequate representative of the private university student population (Nundy et al., 2022). Consequently, analyzing this data shed a comprehensive picture of the impacts of the three marketing techniques on their enrollment decisions, allowing effective answering of the research questions

Table 3: Sample size by quotas

Selected University	Student Population	Sample Proportion to be drawn	Actual sample size to be drawn
Private University			
MKU	53,261	76.75%	294
Daystar University	8,000	11.52%	45
Catholic University	5171	7.45%	43
Total	69,375	100%	382

Table 3 above shows the threshold sample size by quotas. With the help of each university's corresponding administrators, researcher distributed the questionnaire to the students from the selected universities. The data was collected from the students who agreed to participate in the study by informed consent (Di Tillio et al., 2021). These responses were used to build the dataset that was used in this study.

3.5 Research Instrument

The main instrument that was used in this study was a structured questionnaire. The data was collected based on the established constructs linked to the specific digital marketing techniques. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first section of the questionnaire obtained data on the student profile including their age, gender, current university, and level of study (undergraduate or postgraduate. The second, third and fourth sections gathered information regarding the influence of social media, influencer and SEO marketing on the decisions of the students to enroll in their current universities. The fifth section captured details on the student characteristics as it related to this study. Likert-scale questions were employed to measure respondents' agreement or disagreement with the statements related to each constructs. Likert scales offered various response options, ranging from "highly likely" to "highly unlikely." These questions enabled the respondents to express their perceptions on the influence of the three forms of digital marketing. The questionnaire that was utilized is presented in Appendix I.

3.6 Piloting

A pilot test was performed on 39 KCA University students to review the suitability of the questionnaire. The sub-sample respondent answers were evaluated for Cronbach alpha test to determine the correctness to which the targeted respondents interpreted the research questions. The comprehension universality enabled the researcher to determine the level to which construct framing fitted in the current research (Ghazali, 2016). The findings of the pilot study allowed comprehension of the questions that require fine-tuning to ensure the study tool collected the relevant data accurately.

3.6.1 Validity of the Study Instrument

According to Clark and Watson (2019), validity encapsulates the level to which a questionnaire measures what it is intended to measure. The three forms of validity are content, construct, and criterion-related validity. Construct validity ensures that the

questionnaire truly evaluates the theoretical construct it is intended to measure, while construct validity encompasses warranting that the questions cover all relevant aspects of the topic (Singh, 2017). Construct validity is achieved by defining the constructs and thoroughly reviewing the construct underpinnings and components from literature before developing the questionnaire. Likewise, content validity is achieved by defining and generating comprehensive set of items that capture the construct's domain, facet and scope and incorporating a mix of item types like Likert scales and multiple choices for effective measurement of the construct. To guarantee research instrument validity, the study sought input from experts (the academic supervisors). These experts reviewed the instrument and provided recommendations on necessary adjustments. Revisions were conducted iteratively, considering the expert feedback until the instrument was ascertained to be adequately capable of measuring the intended digital marketing constructs.

3.6.2. Study Reliability

Donald, Schoenebeck and Forte (2019) refer consistency to as a situation where the questionnaire fetches stable and regular outcomes when it is administered multiple times or to different groups. A trial-testing the study's questionnaire was conducted on a small sample of respondents to ascertain whether it can collect consistent answers during its full administration. By conducting the pilot test, potentially ambiguous questions were uncovered and important revisions carried out. A Cronbach alpha from the sample results is used to determine the degree to which items in each section reflect the relevant concepts. The trial test revealed a Cronbach alpha of 0.81, which is greater than the mandatory threshold of 0.7 (Taber, 2018). The test results confirmed that the questionnaire was valid and thus, suitable for actual data collection.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

After confirming that the data collection instrument meets the suitability criteria for data collection adequately, the actual data collection exercise, data collection permission was sought from the relevant ethics committees. A letter of data collection was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) as a validation for the research project's legitimacy and adherence to ethical guidelines set forth by the commission. During the actual data collection process, the researcher also sought permission from the respective university

administrators. By following these procedures, the researcher was guided on effective ways of accessing the research respondents to ensure the threshold sample was met for each institution (Oranga & Matere, 2023). The permission from the two sets of authorities ensured that the study complies with the established research guidelines, both at the national and institutional levels.

During the actual data collection exercise, self-reported questionnaires were administered. The researcher inquired about pre-enrollment digital media experiences, preferences, behaviors, and attitudes, post-ad exposure enrollment choices, contexts, and subjective perceptions about digital marketing impact on university enrollment decisions from the respondents. After collection, the data was decoded into MS Excel file and exported to SPSS. V.29 for analysis.

3.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using relevant quantitative techniques. The analysis commenced with cleaning and coding. The process of cleaning primarily entailed removing inconsistent responses from the dataset. This was followed by computation of the descriptive summaries of the responses. The data was presented in relevant frequency tables for the qualitative. The tables depicted the distribution of respondent proportions and the actual responses to structured questions. Ordinal data, measured on rankings was analyzed descriptively based on mode.

Inferential data was obtained by conducting univariate and multivariate linear regressions. Aggregate Likert scale scores for all the digital marketing strategies were regressed on the outcome variable (university enrollment decisions. With these regressions, it was possible to illustrate the probability of observations falling in one of the chosen categories of the dependent variable (Grace & Irvine, 2021). For this case, the test was the final score on a series of statements that evaluated the students' consideration to enroll in their respective private universities after consuming digital marketing content.

3.9 Model Specification

Bivariate and multivariate linear regression models were run utilizing scores of the independent variable (X's) scores and the moderator(Z) on the dependent variable (Y) where X_1 =influencer marketing, X_2 was social media marketing, X_3 = SEO marketing,

Z was the student characteristics while Y=Intention to enroll. The Likert scale values were assigned as follows;

Highly likely=5 Likely=4 Not sure=3 Unlikely=2 Highly unlikely=1

The scoring formula for the moderator variable was similar to the predictor variables. In contrast, the outcome variable was assigned the values 1 or 0 representing was influenced” and was not influenced respectively. Consequently, the coding values assigned

At the same time, the values assigned to Y was as follows

By doing this, the ordinal data was treated as continuous data.

The regression functions for each of the predictors took the following forms;

$$Y=\beta_0+\beta_1X_1+\epsilon\ldots\ldots\ldots\text{.i}$$

$$Y=\beta_0+\beta_2X_2+\epsilon\ldots\ldots\ldots\text{.ii}$$

$$Y=\beta_0+\beta_3X_3+\epsilon\ldots\ldots\ldots\text{.iii}$$

where,

Y represented the student enrollment decisions

X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 were the independent variables or factors corresponding to social media marketing, influencer marketing and SEO marketing respectively.

β_0 represented the constant

β_1 , β_2 , and β_3 represented the beta coefficients which indicated the direction and strength of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variable

ϵ was the error term representing any unexplained variation in the enrollment intention.

The bivariate linear regressions were conducted with the student characteristics(Z) as the moderator. These regressions were as follows;

$$Y=\beta_0+\beta_1X_1+ B_2Z+ \epsilon\ldots\ldots\ldots\text{.iv}$$

$$Y=\beta_0+\beta_2X_2+ B_3Z+ \epsilon\ldots\ldots\ldots\text{.v}$$

$$Y=\beta_0+\beta_3X_3+ B_4Z+ \epsilon\ldots\ldots\ldots\text{.vi}$$

The multivariate linear regression model without the moderator was as follows;

$$Y= \beta_0+ \beta_1X_1+ \beta_2X_2+ \beta_3X_3 + \epsilon\ldots\ldots\ldots\text{.vii}$$

Y represented the student enrollment decisions

X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 were the independent variables or factors corresponding to social media marketing, influencer marketing and SEO marketing respectively.

β_0 represented the constant

β_1 , β_2 , and β_3 represented the beta coefficients which indicated the direction and strength of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variable

ϵ was the error term representing any unexplained variation in the enrollment intention.

Ideally, model (iv) indicated the combined predictive effect of the three marketing strategies on the university enrollment. The moderator variable Z was ploughed into model (vi) to establish the moderating effects of the student characteristics on the relationship between the dependent and independent variables collectively.

The overall model with the moderator was as follows;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \sum \beta_i X_i + \beta_4 Z + \beta_5 (\sum X_i \cdot Z) + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots \text{viii}$$

Y represented the student enrollment decisions

Z represented the moderating variable student characteristics

X_i represented the independent variables, which are social media marketing, influencer marketing, and SEO marketing

β_0 represented the constant

β_i represented specific beta coefficients for social media marketing, influencer marketing and SEO marketing

ϵ was the error term representing any unexplained variation in the student enrollment decisions.

The researcher observed the change in the R^2 after ploughing the moderator into the model to determine the moderation effect of student characteristics on the association between the marketing strategies and the university enrollment decisions among the students.

3.9.1 Diagnostic Tests

3.9.1.1 Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity occurs when two or more independent variables are highly correlated in a regression model. Highly predictor collinearity makes the coefficients of the predictors to change drastically with small data changes. It also causes an increase in S.Es of the coefficient estimates. Bayman and Dexter (2021) claim that under these

circumstances, identifying the factors that are statistically significant, complicating the process of estimating the regression coefficients accurately. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test were used to test for multicollinearity.

3.9.1.2 Normality Test

Normality test encompasses checking whether the residuals of the model follow a normal distribution. Normality test is important for ascertainment of the validity of significance tests and confidence intervals. Kennedy (2022) states that this is vital in determining the overall regression model fit. In this research, normality is diagnosed using the quartile-quartile plot (Q-Q plot). Penning (2024) claims that the Q-Q plot compares the residual quartiles against the normal distribution quartiles.

3.9.1.3 Heteroscedasticity Test

Heteroscedasticity entails a state where the residual variance in a regression model varies across various levels of the independent variables. The presence of heteroscedasticity leads to inefficient estimates and biased statistical tests (Almalik et al., 2021). Heteroscedasticity was diagnosed using plotting the residuals against the fitted values.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Adherence to ethical guidelines outlined by institutional review boards and regulatory bodies is necessary for studies where humans are respondents. For this study, the researcher obtained authorization from the university ethical review board and NACOSTI letter to conduct this study. Compliance with these guidelines served as evidence that the process of carrying out the research was ethical and responsible. To be allowed to conduct the research, the researcher substantiated the efforts that that he could employ to obtain informed respondent consent, ensuring that the respondents voluntarily join the research and have the freedom to drop out of the study at any point if they so wish (Husband, 2020). The researcher also affirmed that the data collection tool emphasized respondent anonymization and effective storage of the data collected to ensure that confidentiality would be ascertained in regard to the details that the respondents submitted during the data gathering exercise. This included assigning codes instead of names to the respondents, keeping the questionnaires in safes that are only accessible to authorized persons and password-protecting the softcopy of the data. The researcher also pledged to emphasize transparency in the data presentation by

ensuring that important findings on the subject are accurately represented without exaggeration or bias. More importantly, he confirmed to the ethical bodies that the data gathering and presentation strategies would eliminate all elements of harm to respondents, like dishonesty that could lead to harm to the vulnerable respondents.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Response Rate

Cumulatively, 382 structured questionnaires were distributed across the three selected universities as per the Krejcie and Morgan 1970 sample threshold. The response rate is presented in table 4.2 below;

Table 4: Response Rate

Response rate	Frequency	Percentage
Returned questionnaires	375	98.2
Unreturned questionnaires	7	1.8
Total	382	100

Table 4 illustrates the study's response rate during the data collection exercise. Out of the 382, a total of 375 respondents gave valid responses, pushing the rate to 98.2%. Since this exceeded, the 70% of the sample threshold, it met the criterion of being 'good' for inferential statistics and generalization (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). The rate was attributed the use of appropriate data collection procedures, trained enumerators, prior notification of the respondents, voluntary participation, anonymity and safety of the respondents. Additionally, each respondent was given adequate time to fill the questionnaires.

4.2. Validity and Reliability Results

The validity and reliability tests were conducted on the pilot study results. This analysis was performed on the predictor and moderator variables because they were the only constructs measured across multiple items.

Table 5: Validity and Reliability Results

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha	Acceptance
Social media marketing	7	0.83	Accepted
Influencer marketing	6	0.79	Accepted
SEO marketing	6	0.85	Accepted
Moderator	5	0.81	Accepted

Table 5 shows that the Cronbach alpha results for various digital marketing strategies in the pilot study ranged from 0.79 to 0.85. According to Kennedy (2022), these results signified that the items that were included in the constructs met consistency and acceptability threshold. Thus, the structured questionnaire was declared able to measure the constructs of digital marketing and university enrollment constructs.

4.3. Respondent Background

The study proceeded to examining the respondent proportions by gender, age bracket, university and level of study. The findings are presented below;

4.3.1. Respondent Gender

The first descriptive analysis entailed classifying the respondents by gender. The findings are presented below;

Table 6: Respondent Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	185	46.7
Male	211	53.3
Total	375	100.0

Table 6 above illustrates the study respondents by gender. Among the selected respondent, males constituted the larger percentage; 210(53.0%), while the rest of the respondents, or 185(46.7%) were female.

4.3.2. Respondent age Bracket

The study proceeded to examining the respondent percentage by age bracket. The findings of this analysis are presented in table 7 below;

Table 7: Respondent age bracket

Age bracket	Frequency	Percent
30 years and below	140	37.3
31-40 years	109	29.1
41-50 years	82	21.9
51 years and above	44	11.7
Total	375	100.0

Table 7 of the descriptive analysis presents the study respondents by age groups. The results indicate that a majority of the respondents were aged 30 and below while the smallest percentage comprised those aged 51 and above. Precisely, 140(37.3%) of the respondents were aged 30 and below. Those who were categorized between 31 and 40 were 109(29.1%) while those who were classified between 41 and 50 were 82(21.9%). The respondents who were aged 51 and above were 44, which was 31.7% of the entire sample. Thus, younger learners in the undergraduate level were more responsive in the study than the older ones who were taking postgraduate courses. These findings correspond to Wanjiku and Obuba(2023), Oluyemi (2020), Philips and Jones(2024) and Ogeto et al.(2024) who established that learners at the lower levels of study are easier to access and study.

4.3.3. Respondent Level of Study

The analysis proceeded to determine the respondent proportions by their current level of study. The findings of this analysis are presented in table 4.6 below.

Table 8: The current level of study of the respondents

Level of Study	Frequency	Percent
Postgraduate	146	38.9
Undergraduate/Bachelor's Degree	229	61.1
Total	375	100.0

From table 8 results, it can be established that 229 (61.1%) of the sample' was taking bachelor's degree. The remaining 146 students or 61.1% were taking postgraduate degrees at the time of the study. The demographic findings correspond to Guest et al.(2017 and Knott et al.(2022) on the tendency of people to accept recruitment based on their experiences, topics being studied and positionality of the researcher.

4.4. Social Media Marketing

Respondent mean and standard deviations were computed for each statement describing effective application of social media marketing. Table 9 presents these statistics for social media marketing.

Table 9: Descriptive statistics for social media marketing

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social media videos provided valuable insights into academic programs and student experiences	4.04	0.36
Short-form educational videos, like Instagram reels, TikTok and YouTube Shots served as effective communication tools	4.76	0.16
Peer conversations on social media platforms provide valuable insights into universities and academic programs	4.06	0.46
Engaging in Q &A chatbots on social media increased my interest in this university	4.78	0.18
Active responses to students reviews on social media was impactful on my decision-making	4.08	0.49
Reviews shared by current and alumni on social media seemed to be more trustworthy than official university advertisement	4.70	0.08
Through social media posts, I learned that this university fitted my academic and career goals	4.14	0.50
Aggregate	4.37	0.32

From table 9 results, each of the statements had a minimum mean score of 4. The lowest mean was for the statement that social media videos provided valuable insights into academic programs and student experiences” [mean=4.04, SD=0.36]. On the other hand, the highest mean was for the statement “engaging in Q &A chatbots on social media increased my interest in this university” [4.78, SD=0.18]. Thus, prospective learners consider information from social media to be important. Preference of social media and its associated features could make is an important tool for convincing prospective learners to enroll. These findings are match Kusumawati (2019), Oluyemi (2020), and Isaacs and Moulder (2024) by illuminating how social media is viewed as a communication platform that creates balance, allowing effective sharing of opinions and experiences among stakeholders. However, it contradicts the findings of Kimani and Obwatho (2020) by decimating the significance Q &A chatbots as key social media features.

4.6. Influencer Marketing

The study assessed the university information access and use behavior and perception of various influencer marketing attributes in relation to private university enrollment. Descriptive statistics for the responses given to each statement for the influencer marketing construct were computed. Table 10 below presents the findings of these computations.

Table 10: Descriptive statistics for influencer marketing

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Influencers recommendations about universities affected my enrollment decisions	4.18	0.42
I considered Influencers as a source reliable information about university programs	4.71	0.18
Influencer's number of likes, comments, and shares influenced my decision to explore a university's programs	4.22	0.35
An influencer with verified status associated with a university made me view academic programs here to be more credible	4.64	0.15
Exposure to influencers first hand student experience influenced my decision to enroll in this university	4.22	0.53
The transparency of an influencer's promotion affected my perception of the university	4.81	0.08
Information on career opportunities related to a program increases motivation to apply in this university	4.32	0.46
Aggregate	4.44	0.31

From table 10, it is evident that each statement had a mean score of at least 4 for influencer marketing. The statement “the transparency of an influencer’s promotion affected my perception of the university” had the highest average score[mean=4.81, SD=0.08] That said, the statement “Influencer’s number of likes, comments, and shares influenced my decision to explore a university’s “ had the lowest mean[mean= 4.22, SD=0.35] indicating that the respondents were most swayed to enroll by the

influencers' transparency and least swayed by the influencers' popularity. These findings match Onyancha (2016) and Munyoro and Nhevere (2019) which show that product endorsement by celebrities can boost the perceptions of a brand or service and the subsequent purchasing decisions among the target customers, including learners.

4.7. SEO Marketing

The study examined the SEO marketing views in relation to university enrollment. A descriptive of the scores for the statements that consisted the constructs of SEO marketing was conducted. Table 11 below presents these findings;

Table 11: Descriptive statistics for SEO marketing

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Well optimized university website (like Fast loading speed, easy navigation) improves my preference for an institution	4.22	.47
Specific search queries (like best universities for business management) are commonly used to find relevant institutions	4.70	.26
Websites that offer comprehensive and well-structured information about academic programs have the highest utility for university research	4.19	.52
Clear and accessible academic program descriptions contribute to better decision-making	4.77	.17
A mobile-friendly university website provides a more convenient browsing experience	4.15	.52
Easy access to a university's contact options (e.g., email, phone, live chat) increases the likelihood of making an inquiry about a program	4.67	.21
Universities that appeared at the top of search engine results seem more reputable	4.21	.53
Quick and informative responses from university representatives encourage further engagement with the institution	4.65	.05
The availability of step-by-step guidance on the application process makes it easier to complete the application	4.24	.55
Aggregate	4.42	0.36

From table 11 results, it can be established that that the lowest mean score for the statements that constituted the SEO construct was for the statement “A mobile-friendly university website provides a more convenient browsing experience” [mean=4.15, SD=0.52]. On the other hand, the maximum mean score was for the statement “Clear and accessible academic program descriptions contribute to better decision-making” [mean=4.77, SD=0.17]. This suggests that the most impactful feature in SEO in regard to enrollment decisions is the website’s curation to disseminate relevant information to the prospective learner. In contrast, making the website mobile-friendly has the least influence of the prospective learner’s decision to enroll in the private university. These findings are consistent with the studies of Immelman and Roberts-Lombard (2015) and Labausa et al. (2023) which show that that incorporation of multiple factors in digital marketing tools and platforms to demonstrate how relevant the university is in attainment of personal goals influences learner decisions to enroll in universities.

Further analyses established that the influence of SEO marketing was highest(n=358), followed by influencer marketing(n=314) and social media (n=245), respectively. SEO marketing had the highest influence in private university enrollment decision-making among prospective learners across all levels of learning, genders and age groups, while social media marketing is the least influential, especially among prospective learners who are aged 30 years and above.

4.8. Moderating Variable

A descriptive of the scores for the statements that consisted the constructs of student characteristics was conducted. The findings of these assessments are presented in table 12 below

Table 12: Descriptive statistics for moderating variable

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Familiarity with digital tools and search engines enhances the ability to find relevant university information	4.15	0.52
The availability of personal digital devices (e.g., laptop, tablet, smartphone) influences engagement with university websites	4.65	0.14
Reliable internet access eases exploration of university websites	4.76	0.16
Understanding of online application systems impacts the ease of completing the enrollment process	4.19	0.52
Aggregate	4.44	0.34

From table 12, it can be established that the statement

“Familiarity with digital tools and search engines enhances the ability to find relevant university information” had the lowest score [mean=4.15, SD=0.52] while the maximum score was for the statement “Reliable internet access plays a key role in the ability to explore university websites efficiently” [mean=4.76, SD=0.16]. Considering this, the most significant aspect of student characteristic that shapes the private university enrollment decision is access to reliable internet while the least influential one is student familiarity with search engines. These findings correspond to Sikalumbi and Nalumino. (2023), Ogeto et al. (2024) and Wanjiku and Obuba (2023) which indicate that information search behaviors are unique and frequently shaped by individual interests, and for this reason, considering people’s information search characteristics and source preferences among people can maximize marketing impact.

4.9. University Enrollment Decisions

A 5-point scoring approach was used for the university enrollment decisions. Table 13 presents the findings on the means and standard deviations of scores for the various statements.

Table 13: Descriptive statistics for student enrollment decisions

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Clearly stated admission requirements and prerequisites make it easier to determine eligibility for a program.	4.44	.11
Information on career opportunities related to a program increases motivation to apply	4.55	.16
Easy access to a university's contact options (e.g., email, phone, live chat) increases the likelihood of making an inquiry about a program	4.49	.25
Quick and informative responses from university representatives encourage further engagement with the institution	4.46	.19
The availability of step-by-step guidance on the application process makes it easier to complete the application	4.47	.18
Aggregate	4.482	0.178

Table 13 results show the findings on the scores for the university enrollment decisions. It can be established that the scores were significantly close to one another. The statement “Clearly stated admission requirements and prerequisites make it easier to determine eligibility for a program” had the lowest score [mean=4.44, SD=0.11]. Conversely, the statement with the highest score was “Information on career opportunities related to a program increases motivation to apply” [mean=4.55, SD=0.16]. The closeness of the mean scores suggest that learners were influenced by availability of information relating to the careers that are linked to the program and least influenced by presence of information relating to course requirements. These findings correspond to Mathiaka (2023), Wanjiku and Obuba (2023) who state that features of a university's website, video marketing and display ads considerations, social media presence and accessibility, and SEO significantly support the success of the university's digital marketing strategy and student enrollment

4.10. Variable correlations

The study conducted correlation tests to establish variable associations. The qualitative data was converted to quantitative form to allow use of Pearson correlation test. Since the assumptions of normality and linearity were met, the correlation analysis was performed directly. Table 14 below presents the findings of these computations.

Table 14:Correlation Results

		Social media marketing	Influencer marketing	SEO Marketing	Student characte ristics	Student enrollm ent decision s
Social Media Marketing	Pearson Correlation		1	.		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00		.		
	N	375				
Influencer marketing	Pearson Correlation	.254**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	375				
SEO marketing	Pearson Correlation	.480**	.218**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	375				
Student characteristic	Pearson Correlation	..638**	.336**	.546**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00.	.955	.848		
	N	375				
Student enrollment decisions	Pearson Correlation	.547**	.680**	.620**	.494**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	.292	.487	.232	
	N	375				

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on Table 14 results, the associations between social media marketing, Influencer marketing, SEO marketing and student enrollment decisions. Social media marketing and student enrollment decision correlation was positive and statistically significant [$r=0.547$, $P<0.01$], indicating that university enrollment decisions was positively associated with use of social media promotion. These findings correspond to Kimani and Obwatho(2020), Mathiaka (2013), Bungai et al.(2024) and Oluyemi's (2020) finding that social media marketing has a positive association with enrollment decision-making. Likewise, influencer marketing was positively and strongly correlated to student enrollment [$r=0.68$, $p<0.01$] indicating that university enrollment decisions correlated positively with use of influencer marketing by the private universities. These findings correspond to Munyoro and Nhevere (2019, Onyancha (2016) and Rutendo and Lyu (2020) studies which show a positive association between influencer marketing and learner choices. The correlation between SEO marketing and student enrollment was also strong, positive and statistically significant [0.620 , $p<0.01$] indicating that university enrollment decisions was positively connected with SEO use by the private universities. The study also found that the association between student enrollment and student characteristics was high and positive [$r=0.768$, $p<0.01$] indicating that university enrollment decisions was positively associated with student characteristics. There is an alignment between these findings and Labausa et al. (2023), Sikalumbi and Nalumino. (2023), Wanjiku and Obuba (2023) and Bungai et al. (2024) who show the positive link between utilization of different SEO tools, to influence student enrollment.

4.11. Diagnostic Tests

To determine the suitability of the data for regression, three assumptions of linear regression were conducted on the data, heteroscedasticity, normality and multicollinearity to ascertain whether the analyses could be conducted without data transformation. The findings of this assessment are presented below.

4.11.1. Normality Test

The normality test of the dataset was conducted using a Q-Q plot. Figure 2 below presents the findings of this analysis.

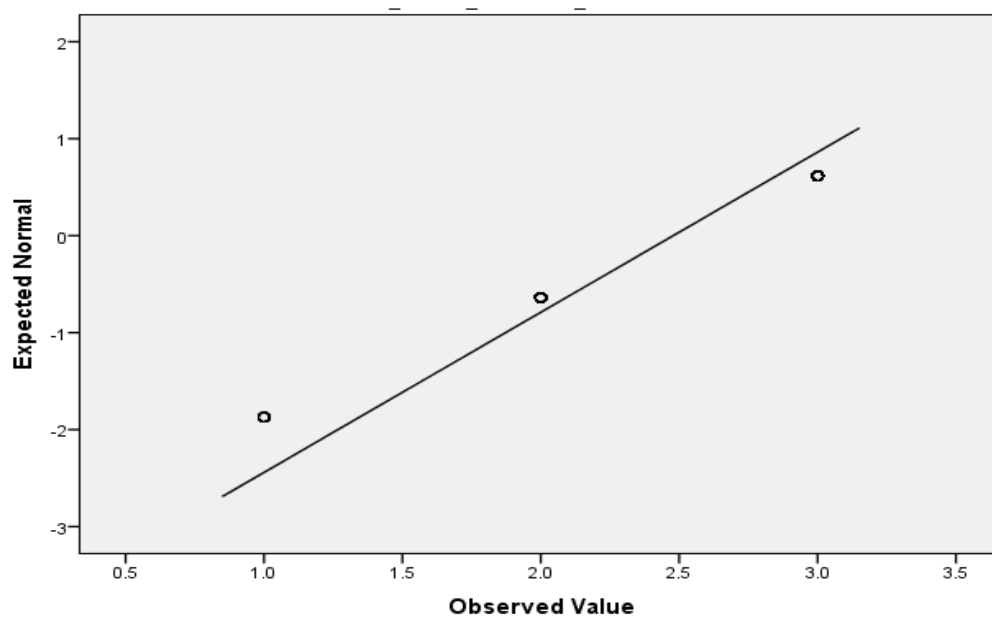


Figure 2:Q-Q Plot for normality test

Figure 2 indicates that the data-points lay on approximately along a straight 45° diagonal line from the bottom left to the top right, suggesting that the data was normally distributed (Penning, 2024).

4.11.2. Multicollinearity Test

The multicollinearity test for this research was conducted using a variance inflation factor. Table 15 below presents the findings of this assessment.

Table 15: Multicollinearity Test

Variable	T	Sig	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	13.552	.000		
Social media marketing	7.290	.000	.746	1.340
SEO marketing	13.247	.000	.760	1.316
Influencer marketing	19.788	.000	.923	1.083

The findings that are presented in table 15 indicate that $VIF < 10$ for all the factors, indicating that the multicollinearity assumption was not violated (Bayman & Dexter, 2021)

4.11.3 Test for Heteroscedasticity

Heteroscedasticity was tested by conducted by plotting the standardized residuals of the multivariate regression analysis against the actual regression predicted values. The findings of this test are presented in figure 3 below.

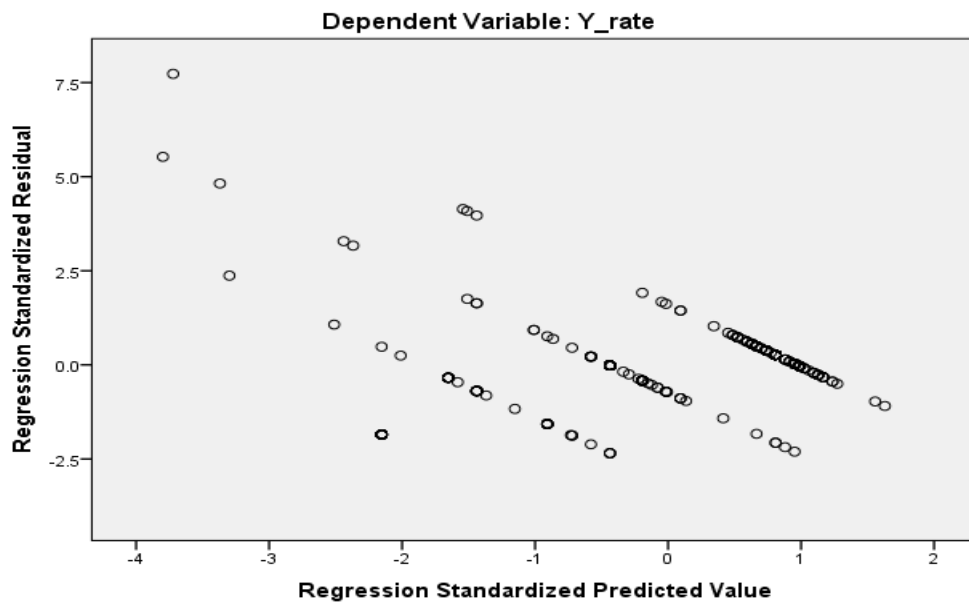


Figure 3:Plot of standardised regression residuals against regression standardized predicted values plot

A unique pattern could be established in the scatter plot, implying that there is no heteroscedasticity (Almalik et al., 2021). Having met the three conditions for multivariate linear regression, the study proceeded to the accrual regression analysis.

4.12. Regression Analysis

The study conducted bivariate and multivariate regression analysis to assess the effect of each of the digital strategies to predict university enrollment decisions. The result for each of the analyses are presented below;

4.12.1. Bivariate Regression Results

4.12.1. 1. Regression Analysis on the Influence of Social Media Marketing on University Enrollment Decisions

The first bivariate linear regression analysis tested the effect of social media marketing on the university enrollment decisions among the respondents. The predictor was entered into the model simultaneously. Table 16 presents the findings of this analysis.

Table 16: Goodness of Fit of the model on the influence of social media marketing on university enrollment decisions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	S.E of the Estimate
(i)	.545 ^a	.298	.296	1.03140

From the model summary, it can be established that the regression model explained approximately 29.8% in student enrollment decisions [$R^2 = .298$, adjusted $R^2=.296$] which accounts for the number of predictors in the model. The S.E of the estimate was 1.0314, indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The relatively high R^2 value suggests that the model provides a good fit to the data.

Table 17: Overall Significance of the Model on the influence of social media marketing on university enrollment decisions

Model (i)	Sum of Squares	df	M.S	F	Sig.
Regression	166.472	1	166.472	156.490	.000 ^b
Residual	394.665	371	1.064		
Total	561.137	372			

The ANOVA results indicated that the model is statistically significant [$F(1, 375) = 156.490$, $p < .005$], indicating that the predictor variable (social media marketing) significantly explained variance in the dependent variable (university enrollment decisions).

Table 18: Individual Significance of the Model on the influence of social media marketing on university enrollment decisions

Model (i)	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	β	S.E	Beta		
(Constant)	1.863	.140		13.304	.000
Social media marketing	.188	.015	.545	12.510	.000

From table 18, it can be established that social media marketing was a significant predictor of university enrollment [$\beta=0.188$, $t(373) = 13.304$, $p < .005$]. The resulting regression model for social media marketing influence on university enrollment decisions is as follows;

University student enrollment decision = $1.863 + 0.188$ social media marketing + ϵi

Ideally, the research had hypothesized that social media marketing does not influence student enrollment decisions for private universities. Based on these findings, it is evident that social media marketing influences private university enrollment decisions among students in the selected universities in Kenya. Hence, the null hypothesis should be rejected. The findings correspond to Down et al. (2024) which advocate for use of digital media to enhance student interests to enroll in learning institutions, including private universities. They are also in line with the findings of Kusumawati (2019), Kimani and Obwatho, (2020), Harini et al. (2023) and Isaacs and Moulder (2024) which indicate that student interaction with an institution's social media marketing content can influence shape their responses, including decisions to enroll.

4.12.1.2. Regression Analysis on the Influence of Influencer Marketing on Student Decisions to Enroll in Private Universities

A regression analysis was conducted to determine the degree to which influencer marketing predicts the decisions of learners to enroll in private universities. The results for this analysis are presented in table 19 below.

Table 19: Goodness of fit of the model on the influence of influencer marketing on student decisions to enroll in private universities

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	S.E of the Estimate
(ii)	.570 ^a	.325	.323	.59970

The model summary results in table 19 indicate that the regression model explained approximately 32.5% in student enrollment decisions [$R^2 = .325$, adjusted R^2 of .323]. The S.E of the estimate was .59970, indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The relatively high R^2 value suggests that the model provided a good fit to the data.

Table 20: Overall significance of the model on the influence of influencer marketing on student decisions to enroll in private universities

Model (ii)	Sum of Squares	df	M.S	F	Sig.
Regression	260.828	1	260.828	322.226	.000 ^b
Residual	300.309	371	.809		
Total	561.137	372			

The ANOVA results indicated that the model was statistically significant [$F(1, 375) = 322.226$, $p < .005$], indicating that the predictor variable (influencer marketing) significantly explains variance in the dependent variable (university enrollment decisions).

Table 21: Individual Significance of the model on the influence of influencer marketing on student decisions to enroll in private universities

Model(ii)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	S.E	B		
(Constant)	2.462	.074		33.493	.000
Influencer marketing	.237	.013	.682	17.951	.000

From table 21, it is evident that influencer marketing was a significant positive predictor of university enrollment, [$\beta=0.237$, $t(372) = 17.951$, $p < .005$]. These results imply that the null hypothesis should be rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. Influencer marketing positively predicts student enrollment decisions. The resulting regression model for influencer marketing influence on university enrollment decisions is as follows;

$$\text{University student enrollment decision} = 2.462 + 0.237 \text{ influencer marketing} + \epsilon$$

.....(ii)

Notably, the research had hypothesized that influencer marketing does not influence student enrollment decisions for private universities. Based on these findings, it is evident that influencer marketing influences private university enrollment decisions' among students. Hence, the null hypothesis should be rejected. These findings correspond to Onyancha (2016), Nyolo and Njuguna (n.d), and Munyoro and Nhevere(2019) which underscored the significance of using influencers like celebrities to promote a learning institution. Effective use of celebrity endorsement can serve as a strategy of making a private university stand out among competing institutions, increasing the chances of prospective learners to choose them as preferred learning destinations.

4.12.1.3. Influence of SEO Marketing on Student Decisions to Enroll in Private Universities

The third bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether SEO marketing significantly predicts student enrollment decisions with a simultaneous variable entry. Table 22 below presents the findings of this analysis.

Table 22: Goodness of fit of the model on the influence of SEO marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model (iii)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	S.E of the Estimate
	.610 ^a	.372	.370	.27487

The model summary in 22 show that the regression model explained approximately 37.2% in student enrollment decisions [$R^2 = .372$, adjusted $R^2 = .370$] which accounts for the number of predictors in the model. The S.E of the estimate was .29970,

indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The relatively high R^2 value suggests that the model provided a good fit to the data.

Table 23: Overall significance of the model on the influence of SEO marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model (iii)	Sum of Squares	df	M.S	F	Sig.
Regression	208.551	1	208.551	219.443	.000 ^b
Residual	352.586	371	.950		
Total	561.137	372			

The ANOVA results on table 23 indicate that the model was statistically significant at 95% CI [$F(1, 375) = 219.443, p < .005$], indicating that the predictor variable (influencer marketing) significantly explains variance in the dependent variable (university enrollment decisions).

Table 24: Individual significance of the model on Influence of SEO marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model(iii)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	S.E	β		
(Constant)	2.232	.098		22.702	.000
SEO Marketing	.231	.016	.610	14.438	.000

From table 24 results, it is evident that SEO marketing was a significant predictor of university enrollment [$\beta=0.231, t(372) = 14.814, p < .005$]. These findings indicate that based on this research, the use of SEO influences student enrollment decisions. Consequently, the null hypothesis should be rejected. The resulting regression model for SEO influence on university enrollment decisions is as follows;

$$\text{University student enrollment decision} = 2.232 + 0.231 \text{ SEO marketing} + \epsilon$$

Ideally, the research had hypothesized that SEO marketing does not influence student enrollment decisions for private universities. Based on these findings, it is evident that social media marketing influences private university enrollment decisions among

students in the selected universities in Kenya. Hence, the null hypothesis should be rejected. These findings correspond to Mathiaka (2023), Labausa et al. (2023), and Maayah (2024) which show that SEO use has a positive influence on student enrollment decisions. These findings imply that curating the SEO of a private university to meet the information needs of the prospective learners can influence the enrollment decisions positively.

4.12.1.4. Influence of Social Media Marketing on Student Decisions to Enroll in Private Universities with Student Characteristics with a Moderator

A regression analysis was conducted to determine the degree to which social marketing predicts the decisions of learners to enroll in private universities with student characteristics as a moderator. The two variables were entered into the regression model. Both variables were mean-centered to reduce multicollinearity and the interaction term (social media marketing $\times$ student characteristics) was added to the model. The results for this analysis are presented in table 25 below.

Table 25: Goodness of fit of the model on the Influence of social media marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	S.E of the Estimate
(iv)				
	.485 ^a	.235	.233	1.04358

From the model summary statistics in table 25 it can be established that the regression model explained approximately 23.5% in student enrollment decisions [$R^2 = .235$, adjusted $R^2 = .233$]. The S.E of the estimate was 1.04358, indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The relatively high R^2 value suggests that the model provides a good fit to the data.

Table 26: Overall Significance of the Model on the Influence of social media marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model(iv)	Sum of Squares	df	M.S	F	Sig.
Regression	178.171	1	178.171	163.602	.000 ^b
Residual	407.307	374	1.089		
Total	585.479	375			

The ANOVA results in table 26 indicates that the model is statistically significant [F (3, 371) = 163.602, $p < .005$], indicating that the predictor variable (social media marketing) significantly explained the variance in the dependent variable (university enrollment decisions).

Table 27: Individual significance of the model on the influence of social media marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model(iv)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	S.E	B		
(Constant)	1.833	.138		13.250	.000
Social media marketing	.171	.015	.552	11.4	.000

Table 27 results show that social media marketing was a significant positive predictor of university enrollment [$\beta=0.17$, $t(371) = 11.4$, $p < .005$].

Table 28: Individual Significance of the moderator on Influence of social media marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model(iv)	Beta In	T	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Tolerance
Student Characteristics	.043 ^b	-.846	.003	.44	.714

It was established that social media marketing significantly predicted enrollment decisions [$\beta=0.17$, $t(371) = 11.4$, $p < .005$] and student characteristic were a significant predictor ($\beta = -0.043$, $p < .05$), suggesting that student characteristics moderate the connection between digital marketing exposure and enrollment decisions. These

findings on social media contradicts the study's hypothesis that student characteristics do not moderate the connection between digital marketing and university enrollment decisions among students.

4.12.1.5. Regression Analysis on the Influence of Influencer Marketing on Student Decisions to Enroll in Private Universities with Student Characteristics a Moderator

A regression analysis was conducted to determine the degree to which influencer marketing predicts the decisions of learners to enroll in private universities with student characteristics as a moderator. Both variables were mean-centered to reduce multicollinearity and the interaction term (influencer marketing $\times$ student characteristics) was added to the model. The results for this analysis are presented in table 21 below.

Table 29: Goodness of fit of the model on the influence of influencer marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model (v)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	S.E of the Estimate
	.548 ^a	.30	.28	.11197

From the model summary in table 29, it can be established that the regression model explained approximately 30% in student enrollment decisions ($R^2 = .30$, adjusted $R^2 = .28$] which accounts for the number of predictors in the model when student characteristics were removed. The S.E of the estimate was 0.11197, indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The relatively high R^2 value suggests that the model provides a good fit to the data.

Table 30: Overall Significance of the model on Influence of influencer marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model (v)	Sum of squares	df	M.S	F	Sig
Regression	274.425	1	274.425	329.959	.000 ^b
Residual	311.054	374	.832		
Total	585.479	375			

The ANOVA results indicated that the model is statistically significant [$F(3, 371) = 329.959, p < .005$], indicating that the predictor variable (influencer marketing) significantly explains variance in the dependent variable (university enrollment decisions with the moderator).

Table 31: Individual significance of the model on the Influence of influencer marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model(v)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	S.E	B	t	
(Constant)	2.436	.074		33.126	.000
Influencer marketing	.231	.013	.685	18.165	.000

It was established that influencer marketing significantly predicted enrollment decisions and student characteristic were a significant predictor ($\beta = -0.043, p < .05$), suggesting that student characteristics moderate The connection between digital marketing exposure and enrollment decisions. These findings on social media contradicts the study's hypothesis that student characteristics do not moderate The connection between digital marketing and university enrollment decisions among students.

From table 31 results, it is evident that SEO marketing was a significant positive predictor of university enrollment when student characteristics are included as a moderating variable [$\beta=0.231, t(371) = 18.165, p < .005$].

Table 32: Individual significance of the moderator variable on the Influence of influencer marketing on student enrollment decisions

Model(v)	Beta In	T	Sig.	Partial	Collinearity
				Correlation	Tolerance
Student characteristics	.051 ^b	1.290	.198	.067	.898

It was established that influencer marketing significantly predicted enrollment decisions [$\beta=0.231$, $t(371) = 11.4$, $p < .005$] and student characteristic were not a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.051$, $p > .05$), suggesting that student characteristics moderate The connection between digital marketing exposure and enrollment decisions, but the effect is not statistically significant for influence marketing. These moderation findings on influencer marketing contradict the study's hypothesis that student characteristics do not moderate The connection between digital marketing and university enrollment decisions among students.

4.12.1.4. Regression analysis on the influence of SEO marketing on student decisions to enroll in private universities with student characteristics as a moderator

A regression analysis was conducted to determine how SEO marketing predicts the decisions of learners to enroll in private universities with student characteristics as a moderator. Both variables were mean-centered to reduce multicollinearity and the interaction term (SEO $\times$ student characteristics) was added to the model. The results for this analysis are presented in table 22 below.

Table 33: Goodness of fit of the model on the influence of SEO marketing on student decisions to enroll in private universities

Model (vi)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	S.E of the Estimate
	.578 ^a	.334	.332	.18232

From the model summary in table 33 it can be established that the regression model explained approximately 33.4% in student enrollment decisions ($R^2 = .334$, adjusted $R^2=.332$] which accounts for the number of predictors in the model when the intervening variable was removed. The S.E of the estimate was 0.18232, indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The relatively high R^2 value suggests that the model provides a good fit to the data.

Table 34: Overall significance of the model on the influence of SEO marketing on student decisions to enroll in private universities

Model(vi)	Sum of Squares	Df	M.S	F	Sig.
Regression	224.584	1	224.584	232.740	.000 ^b
Residual	360.894	374	.965		
Total	585.479	375			

The ANOVA results indicated that the model is statistically significant [$F(3, 371) = 232.740, p < .005$], indicating that the predictor variable (SEO marketing) significantly explains variance in the dependent variable (university enrollment decisions among students).

Table 35: Individual significance of the model on the influence of SEO marketing on student decisions to enroll in private universities

Model (vi)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients B	t	Sig.
	B	S.E			
(Constant)	2.176	.098		22.112	.000
SEO marketing	.218	.016	.619	15.256	.000

From table 35 results, SEO marketing was a significant positive predictor of university enrollment when student characteristics factored as a moderating variable of this relationship [$\beta=0.218, t(371) = 15.226, p < .005$].

Table 36: Individual significance of the moderator on the influence of SEO marketing on student decisions to enroll in private universities

Model(vi)	Beta In	T	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Tolerance
Student characteristics	0.021 ^b	.456	.648	.024	.794

It was established that influencer marketing significantly predicted enrollment decisions [$\beta=0.218, t(371) = 11.4, p < .005$] and student characteristic were not a significant predictor ($\beta =0.21, p>0.05$).), suggesting that student characteristics moderate The connection between digital marketing and student enrollment decisions, but the effect is not statistically significant for SEO marketing. These moderation

findings on SEO contradict the study's hypothesis that student characteristics do not moderate The connection between digital marketing and university enrollment decisions among students.

4.12.2 Multivariate Regression Results

After establishing that the required assumptions of linear regression were met, the actual regression analysis was carried out. The results for each of the regression analyses are presented below;

4.12.2.1. Multivariate linear regression for the influence of digital marketing on student enrollment decisions in private universities

A multivariate regression analysis was performed to examine the predictive influence of the three digital marketing strategies on the decisions of prospective students to enroll in a private university. The model included the three digital marketing strategies without the moderator. The results for this analysis are presented in table 23 below;

Table 37: Goodness of fit of the multivariate linear regression for the influence of digital marketing on student enrollment decisions in private universities

Model (vii)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	S.E of the Estimate
	.792 ^a	.627	.625	.35117

From the model summary, it can be established that the regression model explained approximately 62.7% in student enrollment decisions ($R^2 = .627$, adjusted $R^2 = .625$) which accounts for the number of predictors in the model when the intervening variable was removed. The S.E of the estimate was 0.35117, indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The relatively high R^2 value suggests that the model provides a good fit to the data.

Table 38: Overall significance of the model on the influence of digital marketing on student enrollment decisions in private universities

Model(vii)	Sum of Squares	df	M.S	F	Sig.
Regression	404.673	3	318.125	335.352	.000 ^b
Residual	156.463	369	.424		
Total	561.136				

Table 38 results indicate that the model was statistically significant $F(3, 369)=335.352, p < .005$.

Table 39: Individual significance of the model on the influence of digital marketing on student enrollment decisions in private universities

Model(vii)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	S.E	Beta		
(Constant)	1.208	.090		13.386	.000
Social media marketing	.073	.011	.212	6.744	.000
Influencer marketing	.190	.010	.539	19.171	.000
SEO marketing	.152	.012	.394	12.653	.000
a. Dependent Variable: University enrollment					

From table 39 findings, it is evident that the three digital marketing strategies were a significant predictor of university enrollment.

The multivariate linear regression results showed that;

Social media marketing was a significant predictor of university enrollment ($\beta=0.073, t(371)=6.744, p < .005$)

Influencer marketing was a significant predictor of university enrollment $\beta=0.190, t(371)=19.171, p < .005$)

SEO marketing was a significant predictor of university enrollment $\beta=0.152, t(371)=12.653, p < .005$)

The resulting regression model for digital marketing influence on university enrollment decisions is as follows;

University student enrollment decision = $1.208 + 0.073 \text{ Social media marketing} + 0.190 \text{ Influencer marketing} + 0.152 \text{ SEO marketing} + \epsilon$

The multivariate linear regression found that social media marketing, influencer marketing and SEO marketing jointly influence enrollment decisions among private university learners. This implies that a private university can increase the likelihood of prospective learners choosing them as their preferred learning centers if they use these digital marketing tools jointly.

The study's hypothesis was that digital marketing does not influence student enrollment decisions. However, the findings contradict this hypothesis, implying that the null hypothesis should be rejected. These findings are consistent with Labausa et al. (2023), Wanjiku and Obuba(2023), Maayah (2024) and Bungai et al.(2024) which show that combining various platforms, including SEO, social media marketing influencers and

content marketing can boost online visibility. This can enhance the institution's image and reputation, which are pivotal for influencing enrollment decisions among prospective learners.

4.12.3. Multivariate Linear Regression Model with Moderator or the Impact of Digital Marketing on Student Enrollment Decisions in Private Universities

A multivariate regression analysis was performed to examine the predictive influence of the three digital marketing strategies on the decisions of prospective students to enroll in a private university with student characteristics as the moderating variable. All variables were mean-centered to reduce multicollinearity and the interaction term (Social media x Influencer x SEO x student characteristics) was added to the model. The results for this analysis are presented in table 24 below;

Table 40: Goodness of fit of the model on the multivariate regression analyses for the influence of digital marketing strategies on university enrollment decisions

Model (viii)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	S.E of the Estimate
	.821 ^a	.674	.672	.36202

The model summary statistics show that the regression model explained approximately 62.7% in student enrollment decisions [$R^2 = .674$, adjusted $R^2 = .625$] which accounts for the number of predictors in the model when the intervening variable was removed. The S.E of the estimate was 0.36202, indicating the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The relatively high R^2 value suggests that the model provides a good fit to the data.

Table 41: Overall significance of the model on the influence of digital marketing strategies on university enrollment decisions

Model(viii)	Sum of Squares	df	M.S	F	Sig.
Regression	443.908	4	110.977	348.373	.000 ^b
Residual	117.229	368	319		

It evident that the model was statistically significant [$F(5, 369) = 348.373, p < .005$].

Table 42: individual significance of the model on the influence of digital marketing strategies on university enrollment decisions

Model(viii)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
	B	S.E			
(Constant)	.571	.100		5.728	.000
Social media marketing	.114	.010	.330	11.066	.000
Influencer marketing	.208	.009	.591	23.468	.000
SEO marketing	.179	.011	.466	16.534	.000

a. Dependent Variable: University enrollment

The following details could be inferred from these results;

The predictive effect of social media marketing on predicting university enrollment improved and remained statistically significant with the incorporation of student characteristics ($\beta=0.114, p=0.00$)

The predictive effect of influencer marketing reduced but remained a statistically significant predictor of university enrollment with incorporation of the moderator ($\beta=0.208, p=0.00$)

The effect of SEO marketing coefficient reduced but remained a statistically significant predictor of university enrollment with exclusion of the moderating variable ($\beta=0.179, p=0.00$).

Table 43: Individual significance of the moderator variable for the influence of digital marketing strategies on university enrollment decisions

Model(viii)	Beta In	T	Sig.	Partial	Collinearity
				Correlation	Tolerance
Student characteristics	-.312 ^b	-10.557	.000	-.481	.641

Table 43 indicates that the interaction between influencer marketing and student characteristics was significant, [$\beta = -0.312, p < 0.05$]. This indicates that student characteristics significantly moderated The connection between digital marketing and student enrollment decisions.

These moderation findings on collective social media marketing contradict the study's hypothesis that student characteristics do not moderate The connection between digital marketing and university enrollment decisions among students. Therefore, the null hypothesis should be rejected. These findings are consistent with Harini et al(2023), Isaac's and Moulder(2024), Adeyanju et al. (2019) and Ogeto et al.(2024) which buttresses the significance of learner characteristics like Personal interest, parental influence, the university's reputation, ranking, and tuition cost on the promotion-linked enrollment decisions. For a digital marketing strategy to be effective, it must be linked to expected audience characteristics, including digital media and information search preferences.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This study was conducted to investigate the impact of various digital marketing strategies on the enrollment decisions of prospective learners at private universities. The specific focus was on how social media marketing, influencer marketing, and SEO affect prospective students' perceptions and choices of private universities. This chapter presents the interpretation of the findings in the context of existing literature, highlights and clarifies the key patterns, and shows the implications for university marketing strategies. The directions that future research on this subject should take are also highlighted.

5.2. Summary of Findings

In this section, the research findings, based on the objectives, are discussed.

5.2.1. Social Media Marketing and Private University Enrollment Decisions

The first question that the study aimed to address was determining whether social media marketing influences prospective learner enrollment in private universities. With a coefficient of 0.188 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.298, the regression findings show that social media marketing has a weak but positive and significant influence on the university enrollment decisions for the prospective learners in private universities. The size of the coefficient was the smallest among the three marketing techniques. The findings led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. These findings corresponded to Kusumawati (2019), Harini et al. (2023), Ogeto et al. (2024), Isaacs and Moulder (2024), Bungai et al. (2024), Maayah (2024), Mathiaka (2023), and Kimani and Obwatho (2020) showing that social media marketing can serve as an effective tool for swaying prospective learners to enroll in a particular university.

5.2.2. Influencer Marketing and Private University Enrollment Decisions

The second question of the study sought to answer the question of whether influencer marketing influences the prospective learners' enrollment in private universities. The regression findings indicated that marketing strategy has a weak but positive and significant influence on the university decisions among the prospective learners to enroll in private universities. Its coefficient ranked highest among the three marketing

strategies in terms of influencing student decisions. The study establishes consistency between these findings and those of Jin et al. (2019), Reinikainen et al. (2020), Deepa and Giridhar (2018), Rutendo and Lyu (2020), Onyancha (2016), and Labausa et al. (2023) which indicate that celebrity endorsements can influence purchase of products, including education. Thus, the influence of influencer marketing on private university enrollment decisions was thus confirmed, and the null hypothesis was rejected. The findings on influencer marketing are in line with the assumptions of social influence theory, which suggests that people behave the way they behave as a response to requests or orders from an authority figure, a smaller group, or an individual can influence the majority's beliefs or behaviors, actions of others (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017).

5.2.3. SEO Marketing and Private University Enrollment Decisions

The third research question was whether SEO marketing influences the decisions of prospective learners to enroll in private universities. The regression findings reveal that SEO marketing has a weak but positive and significant influence on the university decisions among the prospective learners in private universities. The size of the coefficient ranked second among the three marketing strategies. There is a striking consistency between these findings and Mathiaka (2023), Labausa et al. (2023) and Maayah(2024), Sikalumbi and Nalumino. (2023), Reinikainen et al. (2020), Deepa and Giridhar (2018), Rutendo and Lyu (2020), Onyancha (2016), Labausa et al.' 's (2023), Maayah (2024), Bungai et al. (2024) and Wanjiku and Obuba (2023). With the confirmation that SEO marketing influences private university enrollment decisions among students, the null hypothesis rejected.

The findings were also consistent with the theory of planned behavior, which suggests that behavior and actions originate from deliberate decision-making processes, as people seek to achieve specific goals or outcomes (Ajzen, 2020). This is because the study confirms how people actively search for relevant information about what they want, and decide on the actions to undertake action based on their plans from the outset. The internal perceptions of online browser results page ranking are proven opinion and decision-shapers in this research.

5.2.4. The moderating Effect of Students' Characteristics on the Connection Between Digital Marketing and University Enrollment

Both bivariate and multivariate regression findings revealed that student characteristics mediate The connection between the individual and collective marketing strategies with university enrollment. The interaction was statistically significant for social media marketing and multivariate linear regression models only, but the effect was present in SEO and influencer marketing strategies. With the findings confirming that student characteristics moderate The connection between digital marketing and university enrollment decisions among the selected student population, the null hypothesis was rejected. These findings match those of Immelman and Roberts-Lombard (2015), Down et al. (2024), and Adeyanju et al. (2019). The moderating influence of student characteristics on the link between digital marketing and private university enrollment decisions was thus established.

5.3. Conclusion

This study aims to examine the influence of social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and influencer marketing strategies on student enrollment intentions in private universities in Kenya. The study hypothesized that these digital marketing strategies positively influence the views of private universities and enhance the intentions to enroll in them. The study was grounded in Engagement Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Social Influence Theory.

The study established that social media marketing is a significant predictor of the decisions of prospective learners to enroll in private universities. That said, unlike the hypothesized expectations, the link between the dependent and independent variables was weak. Social media had the smallest prediction effect among the three digital marketing strategies. The student characteristics had statistically significant moderation effect on this relationship. which means that other factors, apart from digital marketing, influence private university enrollment decisions.

Influencer marketing had a statistically significant prediction effect on student enrollment decisions among the selected private university students. The size of the coefficient ranked second among the three strategies. Unlike social media marketing, the student characteristics moderated The connection between influencer marketing and university enrollment, but The connection was not statistically significant.

Based on the size of the coefficient, SEO marketing was the strongest predictor of student enrollment decisions. Similar to influence marketing, student characteristics moderated The link between SEO marketing and student enrollment decisions for private universities. However, the moderation effect was not statistically significant

Both bivariate and multivariate results of this study established that the prospective students' characteristics, like access to the internet and information search behaviors, moderate the link between digital marketing and university enrollment. The findings also match empirical findings in contemporary literature and provide meaningful insights into the evolving landscape of higher education marketing and the growing importance of digital platforms in attracting and converting prospective students to current students.

5.4. Recommendations

Policymaking. The policymakers like the CUE, ministry of education and university council should formulate policies that encourage marketers in private universities to utilize and tailor their marketing strategies to cater for information needs of diverse student characteristics. This can help to maximize the effects of these strategies on student decision-making processes, and increase student enrollment, leading to financial sustainability of these institutions and educational inclusion. .

Managerial. The private university marketers and other stakeholders who are involved in promoting private universities with ability to tailor their marketing message and strategies based on demographic preferences have the highest chances of influencing the students to consider enrolling in their universities. Finding the right balance in digital marketing promotion of private universities is crucial. Using social media marketing alone while disregarding SEO and influencer marketing can undermine enrollment decisions among the prospective learners. The best way to achieve this is to use the three digital marketing strategies together, but emphasizing SEO and influencer marketing to maximize student enrollment.

5.5. Suggestion for Future Research

This study established that digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on the decisions of private university students to enroll in private universities. However, the marketing could explain a maximum of 67.4% of the change in student enrollment decisions indicating that there are other factors that are unaccounted for in the decision-

making process. Future studies should embark on assessing other factors that complement digital marketing to influence the learner's decisions to enroll in these universities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello? Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. My name is **Mark Murugu**. I am a Master's student in Marketing at Tharaka University. I am conducting research to explore the influence of digital marketing strategies on **Private** university enrollment decisions. Specifically, I am interested in investigating the roles **that search engine optimization (SEO), social media campaigns, and influencer/celebrity marketing** play in influencing prospective students to choose a private university. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study. Your insights and experiences will be incredibly valuable in building knowledge on this subject. This interview will take approximately 18 minutes. Feel free to answer the questions and seeking clarification on any point. Once again, thank you for your participation.

SECTION A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

a. Indicate your gender Male [☐] Female [☐]

b. Indicate by ticking your age

Age Bracket	Tick
Below 30 years	☐
31-40 years	☐
41-50 years	☐
51 years and above	☐

c. Indicate your current University

Name of the University	Tick
i. Daystar University	☐
ii. Mount Kenya University (MKU)	☐
iii. Catholic University of East Africa (CUEA)	☐

d. Indicate your level of study Undergraduate [☐] Postgraduate [☐]

SECTION B

Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements on **influencer marketing, social, SEO, student characteristics and enrollment** decisions in private universities by ticking in the appropriate box (**where 5--Highly likely, 4-Likely 3 Neither likely nor unlikely, 2-Unlikely, 1-Highly unlikely**)

S/NO	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
	Influencer Marketing					
1.	Influencers recommendations about universities affected my enrollment decisions					
2.	Influencers provide reliable information about university programs					
3.	Influencer's number of likes, comments, and shares influence my decision to explore a university's programs					
4.	An influencer with verified status associated with a university makes academic program more credible					
5.	Exposure to influencers first hand student experience influenced my decision to enroll in the universities					
6.	The transparency of an influencer's promotion (e.g., clearly stating it is sponsored) affected your perception of the university					

(**5--Highly likely, 4-Likely 3 Neither likely nor unlikely, 2-Unlikely, 1-Highly unlikely**)

	Social Media Marketing	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Social media videos provide valuable insights into academic programs and student experiences					
2.	Short-form educational videos, such as Instagram reels, TikTok and you tube shorts serve as effective communication tools					

3.	Peer conversations on social media platforms provide valuable insights into universities and academic programs					
4.	Engaging in Q &A chatbots increased my interest about my university					
5.	I am more likely to apply to an institution that actively responds to students reviews on social media					
6.	Reviews shared by current and alumni on social media are more trustworthy than official university advertisement					

(where 5--Highly likely, 4-Likely 3 Neither likely nor unlikely, 2-Unlikely, 1-Highly unlikely)

	SEO Marketing	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Universities that appear at the top of search engine results seem more reputable					
2.	Well optimized university website (e.g. Fast loading speed, easy navigation) improves my preference for an institution					
3.	Specific search queries (e.g. best universities for business management) are commonly used to find relevant institutions					
4.	Website that offers comprehensive and well-structured information about academic programs are more useful for university research					
5.	Clear and accessible academic program descriptions contribute to better decision-making					
6.	A mobile-friendly university website provides a more convenient browsing experience					

(where 5--Highly likely, 4-Likely 3 Neither likely nor unlikely, 2-Unlikely, 1-Highly unlikely)						
	Student Characteristics	1	2	3	4	5
	Familiarity with digital tools and search engines enhances the ability to find relevant university information					
2.	Understanding of online application systems impacts the ease of completing the enrollment process					
3.	Reliable internet access plays a key role in the ability to explore university websites efficiently.					
4.	The availability of personal digital devices (e.g., laptop, tablet, smartphone) influences engagement with university websites					

(where 5--Highly likely, 4-Likely 3 Neither likely nor unlikely, 2-Unlikely, 1-Highly unlikely)

	Student Enrollment decisions	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Clearly stated admission requirements and prerequisites make it easier to determine eligibility for a program.					
2.	Information on career opportunities related to a program increases motivation to apply					
3.	Easy access to a university's contact options (e.g., email, phone, live chat) increases the likelihood of making an inquiry about a program					
4.	Quick and informative responses from university representatives encourage further engagement with the institution					

5.	The availability of step-by-step guidance on the application process makes it easier to complete the application					
6.	A transparent timeline for application deadlines and admission decisions influences motivation to apply					

Appendix II. The List of Private Universities in Kenya

United States International university (USIU)	Africa Nazarene University
Scott Christian University	Kenya Methodist University
University of East Africa Baraton	St. Paul's University
Kabarak university	KAG University
Strathmore University	Gishu Catholic University of East Africa
Africa International University	Lukenya University
Kenya Highlands evangelical university	Zetech College
Great Lakes University	Kiriri Women's University of Science and technology
MKU	The East African university
Adventist University of Africa	Tangaza University College
KCA university	Marist international university College
Daystar University	Uzima University College
Hekima University College	Pan African University
Gretsa University	Presbyterian university of East Africa
Africa International university	Riara University
UMMA University	Management University of Africa
Amref International university	Agha Khan University

Appendix III. Krejcie & Morgan (1970) Formula

The formula is as follows;

$$S = \frac{X^2 \cdot N \cdot P \cdot (1-p)}{(E^2 \cdot (N-1) + (X^2 \cdot P \cdot (1-P)))}$$

Where;

S=Required sample size

P=Estimated proportion of the population

E=Expected margin of error

X²=The table value for the desired confidence level (95% or 99%)

N=Population size

Appendix IV: Tharaka University Ethics Clearance

THARAKA

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INSTITUTIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

8th August 2025.

REF: TUNISERC/NSEC/ M064

Dear, Mark Murimi Murugu

RE: Digital Marketing Strategies, Students Chrematistics and Students Enrolment Decision in Selected Private Universities in Kenya

This is to inform you that *Tharaka University ISERC* has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your application approval number is *ISERC04023*. The approval period is *8th August 2025– 8th August 2026*.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by *Tharaka University ISERC*.
- iii. Death and life threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to *Tharaka University ISERC* within 72 hours of notification
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to *Tharaka University ISERC* within 72 hours
- v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to *Tharaka University ISERC*.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI)

<https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke> and also obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Fidelis Ngugi
Chair, ISERC Tharaka University



Appendix V: Tharaka University Postgraduate Introductory Letter

THARAKA

P.O BOX 193-60215,
MARIMANTI, KENYA



UNIVERSITY

Website: <https://tharaka.ac.ke>
Social Media: tharakauni
Email: info@tharaka.ac.ke
Phone : +254745 838 353

**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES**

REF: TUN/BPGS/PL/22/25

22nd August 2025.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: MARK MURIMI MURUGU ADMISSION NUMBER CMT11/05931/23

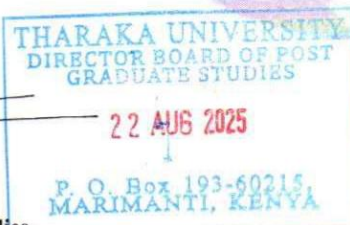
Mr Mark Murimi Murugu is a postgraduate student at Tharaka University undertaking a Master of **Business Administration (marketing option)** degree. The student has completed her coursework and is expected to proceed for collection of data after successfully defending her proposal at faculty level. The title of the study is "*Digital marketing strategies, student characteristics and student enrolment decisions in selected private universities in Kenya..*"

Any assistance accorded to her will be highly appreciated.

Thank you in advance.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Ambrose Vengi, Ph.D.
Director, Board of Postgraduate Studies.



TUN is ISO 9001:2015 Certified...



Education for Freedom/Elimu ni Uhuru

Appendix VI: NACOSTI Research Permit

 REPUBLIC OF KENYA	
Ref No: 531021	Date of Issue: 01/September/2025
RESEARCH LICENSE	
	
This is to Certify that Mr.. MARK MURIMI MURUGU of Tharaka University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Kiambu, Machakos, Nairobi on the topic: DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES, STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND STUDENT ENROLMENT DECISIONS IN SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA for the period ending : 01/September/2026.	
License No: NACOSTI/P/25/4178995	
531021	
Applicant Identification Number	Ag. Director General
	NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION
	Verification QR Code
	
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