
Factors of Perception Influencing Low Student Enrollment in The Diploma in Marketing at Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar (KPMSI)

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Abstract

Declining enrolment in business-related diploma programmes, particularly in marketing, has emerged as a critical concern despite the increasing demand for marketing and digital competencies in today's labour market. This issue is notably evident at Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar (KPMSI), where the Diploma in Marketing programme continues to experience low student intake among SPM school leavers. This mismatch between industry demand and student enrolment raises important questions about how prospective students perceive marketing education and its value. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of students' perceptions on their intention to enrol in the Diploma in Marketing, guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Specifically, the study investigates four key perceptual factors: perceived job market alignment, perceived skill relevance, perceived credential value, and perceived fairness of assessment. These factors are hypothesised to play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes and behavioural intentions towards selecting the programme. A quantitative research design was employed, using a structured survey distributed to 300 SPM school leavers to ensure data reliability and generalisability. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale to capture the degree of agreement on each construct. By providing empirical evidence on how these perceptions influence decision-making, this study offers meaningful insights into the underlying reasons behind low enrolment in marketing programmes. The findings are expected to support education providers in developing more targeted and student-centred strategies, including improving curriculum relevance, enhancing assessment transparency, and strengthening programme positioning in alignment with industry needs. Ultimately, this study contributes to bridging the gap between educational offerings and labour market expectations, while also providing practical implications for increasing student enrolment in the Diploma in Marketing programme and strengthening the future pipeline of marketing professionals.

Keywords : *Diploma in Marketing; Job market alignment; Skill relevance; SPM school leavers; Theory of Planned Behaviour*

I. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the landscape of higher education is undergoing rapid change as school leavers navigate an increasingly competitive and digitalised job market. National higher education statistics from [17] reveal a steady decline in enrolment for business-related diploma programmes, including marketing, even though employers consistently highlight the need for graduates with strong marketing, communication, and digital skills. This situation creates a paradox: while the economy depends on marketing-literate graduates to drive branding, consumer analytics, and online engagement, fewer students are choosing to formalise these skills through structured diploma pathways. At the same time, external career advisory platforms paint a very different picture of the field, as [1] identifies the Marketing Course as one of the highest-income skill courses in Malaysia and highlights that more than 4,000 marketing-related roles are advertised on job portals such as Indeed, spanning positions like marketing executives, content strategists, and digital influencers. These opportunities are closely linked to the growth of e-commerce, social media marketing, and the broader digital economy, where organisations compete aggressively for visibility and customer loyalty, and in principle this should make marketing an attractive and future-proof option for SPM school leavers who want both employability and upward mobility; however, the persistent decline in enrolment suggests that students may not perceive the actual value and potential of marketing qualifications in the same way that the labour market does.

This misalignment is clearly visible at Kolej Professional MARA Seri Iskandar (KPMSI), where the Diploma in Marketing has experienced a noticeable drop in student intake among SPM school leavers over recent intakes, and for KPMSI low enrolment is not merely an administrative issue but directly affects programme viability, resource allocation, and the college's ability to maintain a strong academic ecosystem around marketing and business studies. A prolonged decline could lead to reduced course offerings, fewer specialised lecturers, and limited peer learning environments, ultimately diminishing the overall attractiveness of the programme. From an industry perspective, this trend risks widening skill gaps in critical areas such as branding, consumer research, and digital strategy, as fewer graduates are formally trained in these domains, mirroring broader patterns reported in the

literature where shrinking higher education enrolment has been linked to a smaller pipeline of specialised talent for the labour market. Despite these implications, existing research has not fully captured why SPM leavers, in particular, are reluctant to choose marketing-related diplomas: much of the available literature focuses on university-level marketing degrees in different countries or discusses general student perceptions of business programmes without isolating the unique transition stage faced by SPM graduates, while studies such as those summarised by [26] tend to emphasise the negative or unclear image of marketing—sometimes seen as too “salesy,” unstable, or lacking prestige—but are often based on Western contexts and may not directly reflect Malaysian realities. In the local context, prior work rarely examines vocational-type institutions such as KPMSI or considers how institutional branding, programme positioning, and local community perceptions shape course choice.

Furthermore, previous studies often treat “students” as a homogeneous group and overlook how different SPM streams—such as STEM, commerce, and arts—influence awareness, interest, and perceived fit with marketing, even though [10] notes that diploma choices can be significantly influenced by prior academic streams, with STEM students tending to gravitate towards fields that are seen as technically rigorous and more stable, such as engineering, health sciences, or information technology. In contrast, marketing is frequently viewed as more creative and less structured, which may lead some high-achieving SPM graduates, especially from STEM backgrounds, to underestimate its analytical and strategic components, causing them to overlook marketing as a serious and rewarding professional pathway even when they possess the skills and interests that align with the field. National-level statistics and reports further highlight several perception-based issues that could be influencing course choice among SPM leavers: [17] reports that employability rates for professional courses are as high as 93.1%, yet creative or non-traditional fields, which often include marketing-related programmes, are still perceived as riskier options. The report [7] shows that marketing programmes tend to be rated lower in terms of practical relevance, with an average score of 2.85 out of 5, and that a significant proportion of students view marketing skills as “soft” and easily replaced by informal or gig-economy experience. At the same time, [17] data suggests that marketing and similar diplomas are associated with lower

entry-level salaries (around RM2,500–3,500) compared with some STEM-aligned careers, which may further contribute to the perception that marketing credentials offer a weaker return on investment, even though the digital economy is projected to generate around 25,000 new digital-related roles by 2027 that require integrated marketing and analytical competencies.

Assessment-related concerns also feature strongly in the national discourse on post-SPM educational choices, where [7] reports that approximately 30% of students identify unclear assessment criteria and perceived unfairness in evaluation as key deterrents when considering assessment-heavy programmes, including business and marketing courses. Broader educational reports, such as [14] and related media coverage, similarly highlight challenges related to grading consistency, transparency, and trust in assessment systems, which can influence how students view future programmes that are perceived as heavily exam-based. For SPM leavers who may have recently experienced stressful or high-stakes examinations, these concerns may make them more cautious about selecting a diploma where they believe assessments are not clearly aligned with real industry skills. Taken together, the existing literature suggests that multiple perception-based factors—such as doubts about job market alignment, perceived lack of practical skill relevance, undervalued credential returns, and scepticism about assessment fairness—may be contributing to low enrolment in marketing-related programmes among SPM school leavers. However, these factors have rarely been examined collectively within a single empirical study, particularly in the specific context of KPMSI as a MARA-based institution serving diverse student backgrounds, and this gap provides a strong rationale for a focused investigation into how SPM leavers actually perceive the Diploma in Marketing at KPMSI and how those perceptions influence their intention to enrol.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study adopts the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) introduced by [2], which states that an individual's intention to perform a behaviour is determined by their attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Within this framework, course choice is not seen as a random decision, but as the outcome of underlying beliefs about outcomes (such as employability and salary), social expectations (such as family and peer influence), and perceived ease or difficulty (such as academic demands and assessments). Building on

TPB, this study conceptualises course perception as a bundle of beliefs about four key dimensions: perceived job market alignment, perceived skill relevance, perceived credential value, and perceived fairness of assessment. By empirically examining how these dimensions relate to SPM leavers' intention to choose the Diploma in Marketing, the study extends the TPB framework into a vocational college setting and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of post-SPM decision-making in Malaysia, particularly within a MARA-based institution like KPMSI that plays a strategic role in providing accessible higher education pathways.

In terms of practical significance, the findings are expected to generate evidence-based insights that can help KPMSI and similar institutions redesign their marketing programmes and communication strategies. If, for example, perceived skill relevance is found to be a major concern, curriculum planners may need to increase the visibility of hands-on projects, digital tools, and industry collaborations to demonstrate clear links between classroom learning and real-world marketing roles. If perceived credential value or assessment fairness emerges as a key barrier, programme coordinators might consider reviewing grading rubrics, enhancing transparency, and highlighting successful alumni to build trust among potential students and their families. In the longer term, such adjustments could support national agendas on graduate employability and digital readiness by ensuring that marketing diplomas remain both attractive and aligned with labour market needs, thereby helping to close the gap between industry demand and actual student enrolment in marketing-related programmes.

Based on this background, the present study focuses on SPM school leavers and aims to examine how their perceptions influence their intention to enrol in the Diploma in Marketing at KPMSI. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: (1) to examine the relationship between perceived job market alignment and SPM school leavers' intention to choose the Diploma in Marketing at KPMSI; (2) to determine the influence of perceived skill relevance on SPM school leavers' decisions to select the Diploma in Marketing over other programmes; (3) to assess the effect of perceived credential value on Malaysian SPM leavers' intentions to enrol in a Diploma in Marketing; and (4) to investigate whether perceived fairness of assessment predicts marketing course decision-making among SPM school leavers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Why do excellent SPM graduates skip marketing courses when businesses desperately need them and Malaysia's digital future hangs in the balance? Data from [1] states the Marketing Course is one of the highest income skill courses in Malaysia. Despite this, there are significant declining numbers in the enrolment of diploma in marketing students especially in Kolej Professional Mara Seri Iskandar. This declining enrolment in marketing course could threaten the validity of marketing course in the future. Fewer marketing graduates mean a shrinking pool of talent with formal training in branding, consumer research, and digital strategy, which contributes to skill gaps similar to those seen when overall college enrolment falls. Most existing research such as from [26] are usually about the negative image of marketing course itself thus limiting the generalizability of findings to the broader population of Malaysian SPM leavers. Moreover, prior studies rarely isolate the sole perception of SPM students leavers towards course choice, and almost none focus specifically on marketing programmes in Kolej Professional Mara Seri Iskandar. Taken together, the reviewed literature indicates that course perceptions matter for educational choices, but leaves unanswered how perception towards marketing course shape SPM leavers' decision-making, thereby motivating the present study. The [2] introduced the Theory on Perceived Behaviour, which predicts that a person's intention to perform a behavior is determined by their attitude toward it, subjective norms from others, and perceived behavioural control over obstacles thus this study conceptualizes course perception as a set of beliefs about perceived job market alignment, credential value, skill relevance and fairness of assessment to understand SPM leavers' perception towards marketing courses.

A. Enrollment Intentions in Marketing Education

The dependent variable for this study is the enrolment rate within the Diploma of Marketing at Kolej Profesional MARA (KPM) Seri Iskandar. Enrolment is defined as the successful registration and retention of new students during the annual intake period. Enrolment figures serve as a critical Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the viability of academic programs. A decline in these numbers suggests a misalignment between program offerings and market demand.

Furthermore, secondary data from the Ministry of Higher Education [17] indicates that enrollment in professional and business-related

diplomas across Malaysia has fluctuated, reflecting shifting student preferences towards traditional academic pathways versus industry-ready certifications. By utilizing these historical enrolment records as the DV, this study can objectively measure the extent to which factors from Theory on Perceived Behaviour that correlate with the actual numerical decline observed in KPM Seri Iskandar's database.

B. Perceived Job Market Alignment

Perceived alignment with the job market plays a key role in SPM school leavers' decisions to avoid the Diploma in Marketing. While employment prospects remain, the main factor influencing diploma choices [10], marketing programs often face scepticism due to skill mismatches. Data from [17] shows high employability for professional courses at 93.1%, yet creative fields like marketing carry higher perceived risks. Students tend to prioritize labour market demands, especially with 12.2% graduate unemployment in creative industries [3]. SPM subject combinations also limit access, as STEM paths are often favoured over marketing [16]. Employer recognition of programs further shapes choices. For instance, UiTM marketing diplomas attract interest but still falls behind traditionally "stable" fields [17]. Even though job portals list over 4,000 marketing-related roles, such as executives and influencers, concerns about market saturation deter students. Overall, these factors highlight how job market perceptions, academic preparation, and program recognition strongly influence SPM leavers' avoidance of marketing diplomas, stressing the need for clearer career pathways.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived job market alignment and SPM school leavers' intention to choose the Diploma in Marketing.

C. Perceives Skill Relevance

Perceived skill relevance represents SPM leavers' subjective evaluation of whether Diploma in Marketing curricula develop competencies aligned with digital marketing industry requirements, serving as a critical independent variable influencing enrolment decisions [18],[16]. Despite 18% projected sectoral growth and demand for over 25,000 digital specialists by 2027, marketing programs consistently rank lowest for practical relevance among vocational alternatives, with 68% of commerce stream students viewing skills as "soft" and readily transferable to gig economy roles [7],[19]. This perceptual disconnect where theoretical models overshadow Google Analytics,

SEO, and TikTok advertising competencies mirrors findings and parallels perceived behaviour effects where assessment-skill misalignment demotivates participation.

H2: There is a significant positive influence of perceived skill relevance on SPM school leavers' decisions to select the Diploma in Marketing over other programs.

D. Perceives Credential Value

Perceived credential value is defined as individuals' subjective evaluation of a qualification's benefits relative to costs like time and fees [8]. It serves as a key mediator between SPM academic backgrounds and enrolment intentions for Malaysia's Diploma in Marketing. SPM leavers from commerce or STEM streams, emphasizing Math and Science, often undervalue marketing diplomas due to perceived misalignment with their analytical training, viewing them as creatively oriented and less stable than IT or engineering paths. In contrast, arts-background students see greater fit, fostering higher interest. Data from [17] supports this dynamic, showing 92.5% national employability, yet diplomas secure skilled roles less frequently than degrees. Public institutions achieve 92.5% placement versus privates' 89.8%, but STEM-aligned credentials signal stronger ROI with over RM3,800 salaries over marketing's RM2,500–3,500 entry pay, despite over more than 25,000 jobs available. Only 13.2% of diploma holders pursue further studies, reinforcing entry-level perceptions. This mediation highlights the need for curricula blending analytics with creativity to appeal across SPM profiles, boosting enrolment.

H3 : Perceived credential value significantly affects Malaysian SPM leavers' intentions to enrol in a Diploma in Marketing decisions across commerce/STEM and arts academic streams.

E. Perceives Fairness of Assessment

The perceived fairness of assessment emerges as a crucial independent variable, where SPM leavers evaluate whether marketing program evaluations equitably measure practical competencies versus rote learning. This concern is further echoed by recent data from [7], which documents low course content comprehension (2.8/5) and reveals that 30% of students cite unclear criteria as a primary deterrent for assessment-heavy marketing diplomas. Such systemic opacity is grounded in [24], which highlights how grading inconsistencies discourage marketing pursuits, especially when paired with existing financial barriers. This decrease in trust is

further intensified by broader institutional controversies. For instance, [9] reports that meritocracy pledges were undermined when top SPM scorers were denied matriculation spots, a phenomenon that has negatively impacted the perceived credibility of marketing program assessments. On the frontline, [8],[23] reveals that while teachers acknowledge the benefits of School-Based Assessment (SBA), significant training gaps persist, leading students to view post-SPM marketing evaluations as unfair proxies for actual industry skills. These fairness gaps are further intensified by recent UASA reforms, which [13] links to growing skepticism regarding the equitable evaluation of niche marketing communication skills. Ultimately, even the Malaysia Education Blueprint admit [14] to persistent inequities in oral assessments, paralleling broader marketing evaluation concerns where the respondents is justified to be accurate by using heuristics, which minimizes risks for unstable results while also improving accuracy in decision-making data. [12] We approached potential respondents and asked them to either scan a QR-code to answer the survey or lent them our device for those who could not scan the QR-code. In addition, we conducted convenience sampling and digital outreach, utilizing social media distribution and direct peer-to-peer engagement to maximize response rates.

H4 : Perceived fairness of assessment is a significant predictor of marketing course decision-making effects among SPM leavers.

Conceptual Framework of Low Student Enrolment In The Diploma of Marketing at KPM Seri Iskandar

Below is the Conceptual Framework of The Low Enrolment In The Diploma of Marketing at KPM Seri Iskandar. The framework shows that the Low Student Enrolment In The Diploma Of Marketing at KPM Seri Iskandar is the main dependant variable while the independent variables being Perceived Job Marketing Alignment, Perceived Credential Value, Perceived Skill Relevance and Perceived Fairness Of Assessment.

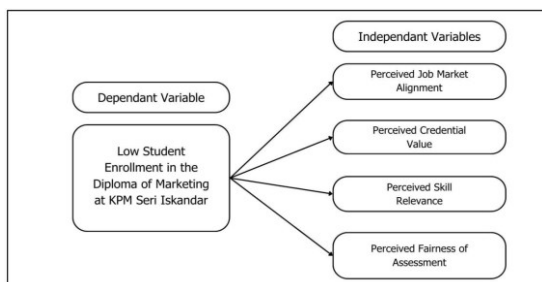


Figure 1.0 : Conceptual Framework for The Low Student Enrolment in the Diploma of Marketing at KPM Seri Iskandar

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

To get the best result, we decided to use quantitative research method as our base. Quantitative data involves numbers to measure in identifying patterns, trends, relationships, and differences via statistical testing. It also ensures accuracy, consistency, and reliability in preparing data for the data in analysis. [21] We chose to use convenience sampling using Google Form (survey method) as our platform.

B. Population Sample

We aimed for SPM graduates and secondary school students as our respondents. Our goal of number for respondents is 300 respondents. This number of respondents is justified to be accurate by using heuristics, which minimizes risks for unstable results while also improving accuracy in decision-making data. [12] We approached potential respondents and asked them to either scan a QR-code to answer the survey or lent them our device for those who could not scan the QR-code. In addition, we conducted convenience sampling and digital outreach, utilizing social media distribution and direct peer-to-peer engagement to maximize response rates.

C. Research Instrument

Before handing out the survey, we adapted the questions from five different papers. Our questionnaire used Likert-scale type of question. First, the respondents were given a scale of 1-5 (1—Strongly Disagree to 5—Strongly Agree) to indicate their agreement towards the question or statement. We divide our survey into two sections—Section A as demographic and Section B as questions for our research. Section B includes our DV and IV.

Table 1 Measurement Instruments adapted from scholar

Variable	Sources
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Marketing Course Enrolment Intention	Nor, A. O., Nadzirah, R., Syed, S. A., Abu H. A., Muhamad A. N. (2023)
Perceived Job Market Alignment	Nor, H. J., Mohamad, I. M (2024)
Perceived Credential Value	Ha, N. T., Dyke, N. V., & Spittle, M. (2025)
Perceived Skill Relevance	Daus, S., Skjelbred, S., Pedersen, C. (2023)
Perceived Fairness of Assessment	Mohd, E. E., Nagaletchimee, A., Najeh, R. A. S. (2023)

D. Data Analysis Method

We analysed our data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Microsoft Excel software. We analysed our data via its percentage and mean score.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Our goal for 300 respondents was completed as 304 respondents answered the survey (n=304). The findings are divided into three sections: Respondent Profile, Descriptive Analysis and Frequency Analysis of Variables.

A. Respondent Profile

Demography is the study of population and the different groups that make them up. [4] In this research, we want to know about the respondent's gender, current status, SPM's study program, awareness, and promotional channel. We asked 5 questions about the respondent's demographics. We chose the result for awareness, and promotion channel for marketing for discussion.

Awareness

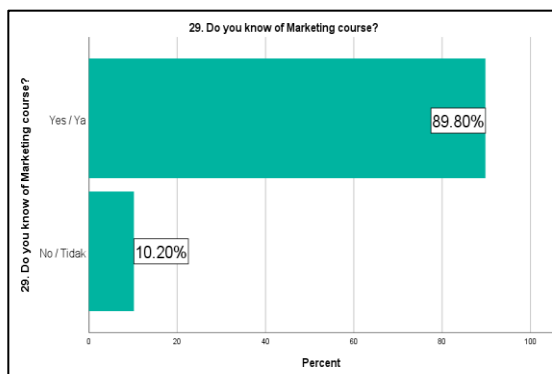


Figure 2.1 : Bar chart on survey result

The chart shows that 89.80% of respondents were aware of Marketing course. This suggests that

Marketing course is quite a well-known course among students that has interests in pursuing a diploma. Despite the positive result, KPMSI should continue its effort in promoting Marketing diploma to ensure more potential students will enrol. This would also improve KPMSI's image and awareness.

Promotional Channel

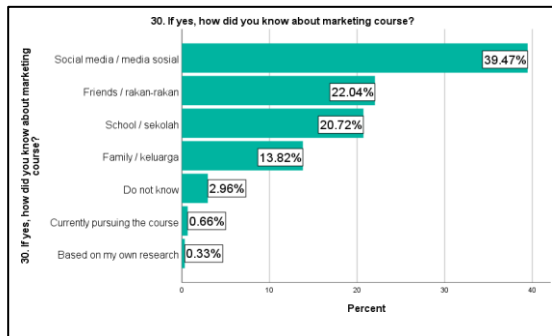


Figure 2.2 : Bar chart on survey result

The bar chart shows that 39.47% of respondents is aware of Marketing course because of social media. This suggests that Marketing course's awareness and promotion is well in social media. In addition, this has the potential to mean that contents about Marketing course became one of the respondent's suggested contents to view. KPMSI should take this opportunity to join in promoting Marketing course so its awareness will be improved.

B. Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Table 2 Mean score for DV and IVs

Variable	Mean Score	Interpretation Level
Perceived Fairness of Assessment (IV 4)	4.08	Significant
Perceived Skill Relevance (IV 3)	4.02	Significant
Perceived Job Market Alignment (IV 1)	3.91	Significant
Perceived Credential Value (IV 2)	3.91	Significant
Marketing Course Enrolment Intention (DV)	3.53	Significant

The mean score for Perceived Fairness of Assessment is 4.08, which indicates it as the highest significant factor. These means indicate strong agreement (above 4.0 threshold) that job market perceptions dominate, aligning with [10], who found employment opportunities as the top extrinsic driver

in Malaysian diploma choices. This suggests the respondents viewed this variable as most favourable in driving the enrolment intention. Marketing Course Enrolment Intention has the lowest mean (3.53), but it is still interpreted as a significant factor. This indicates that not many respondents had the intention to enrol in a marketing course.

V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how perceived job market alignment, perceived skill relevance, perceived credential value, and perceived fairness of assessment influence SPM school leavers' intention to enrol in the Diploma in Marketing at KPMSI, based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The descriptive findings show that all four perception variables recorded high mean scores—fairness of assessment (4.08), skill relevance (4.02), job market alignment (3.91), and credential value (3.91)—while enrolment intention, although still high (3.53), was relatively lower, indicating a gap between positive perceptions and the actual decision to choose marketing as a study option. These results suggest that, despite recognising the relevance of marketing skills and the demand for marketing graduates, SPM leavers remain cautious due to concerns about assessment transparency and perceived long-term career and financial stability, which in turn weaken their intention to enrol.

Overall, the study is important because it highlights that low enrolment in the Diploma in Marketing at KPMSI is not simply caused by a lack of awareness, but by perception-based barriers that institutions can address. By understanding how these four factors shape students' intentions, KPMSI and similar institutions gain a clearer basis to refine programme design, improve fairness and clarity in assessment practices, and communicate more effectively about real labour market opportunities in marketing, thereby supporting efforts to increase future student enrolment.

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