
The Push and Pull of Diploma in Marketing: Determinants of Gen Z's Enrollment Decisions in Marketing Programs

Sharifah Zalia Latisha¹, Khairyna Ayra², Batrisya Sofea³, Faiznur Iman⁴, Noor Fareeza⁵,
Norliza⁶

¹²³⁴⁵⁶ Marketing Department, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia

E-mail: sharifahzalia0106@gmail.com, avrakhairya@gmail.com, batrisyasofea07@gmail.com, faiznr.iman@gmail.com,
fareeza.azmi@mara.gov.my

Abstract

The declining interest among Malaysian SPM leavers in pursuing a Diploma in Marketing has raised serious concerns regarding enrollment sustainability. This study examines the core determinants of Generation Z's enrollment decisions by integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour with the push-pull framework. A quantitative research design was strictly employed, successfully gathering primary data from exactly 300 respondents via an online structured survey questionnaire. While the methodology uses convenience sampling rather than random sampling for operational simplicity, it effectively captured student perspectives. Data analysis was conducted to generate clear descriptive results, specifically focusing on frequency distributions and means score analysis using SPSS. Our findings reveal that Social Media Influence is the most dominant pull factor driving the final enrollment decision, achieving a high means score of 4.36. In terms of frequency, a striking 86.38% of respondents strongly acknowledged its direct impact on their educational choices. Furthermore, Perceived Career Value, Peer and Family Recommendations, and Institutional Digital Marketing all heavily shape this dependent variable. Ultimately, these results underscore the critical necessity for higher education institutions to shift toward peer-led, authentic digital recruitment strategies today.

Keywords : *Enrollment Decision; Theory of Planned Behaviour; Generation Z; Quantitative research; Means score; Random sampling; Descriptive results; Frequency.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Malaysian higher education institutions have been struggling to draw students towards diploma-level business and marketing courses. This issue is especially relevant for Generation Z, commonly defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, whose educational decisions are strongly influenced by career concerns, peer opinions, and digital media exposure [1]. As Malaysia is increasingly adopting aspects of digital transformation and Industry 4.0, marketing education has become ever more important to equip graduates with relevant digital, creative, and analytical skills required by the modern workforce.

Prior studies have indicated that Gen Z students experience high levels of anxiety related to employability, financial stability, and career progression. Many, in fact, shy away from programmes that lack clear career outcomes or structured pathways for further academic advancement [1]. The pull factor played by social media has also grown significantly. Research shows that prospective students are more likely to engage with institutions that present authentic, peer-generated content rather than traditional institutional advertising [2]. This suggests that student perceptions of programme relevance and credibility are increasingly shaped by online peer narratives.

Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar (KPMSI) has witnessed a decrease in student enrolment in the Diploma in Marketing + Certified Professional Marketer (CPM) programme. Despite the programme's alignment with industry needs, particularly digital marketing, content creation, and customer engagement, many SPM school leavers prefer technical programmes, science-based diplomas, or direct entry into employment. These findings suggest that student programme selection decisions can be greatly impacted by low levels of awareness of career prospects, negative perceptions of marketing programmes, and a significant role of social influence, among others. Hence this research aims to investigate the push and pull factors influencing Generation Z students' decisions to enrol in the Diploma in Marketing + CPM programme at KPMSI. Through investigating how career concerns, social media influence, peer recommendations, and perceived programme value influence students' decisions, this study

intends to bring insights useful for KPMSI to bolster recruitment strategies, curriculum positioning, and promotional communications to effectively target future students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies conducted in Malaysia shows how Generation Z (Gen Z) students struggled to navigate the academic institutions after taking the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM); such decisions tend to be made in accordance with the parental influence, social media, and external pressure. This lack of independent decision-making leads to lower enrollments in fields like marketing, which are seen as less prestigious compared to medicine, law, or engineering. If Gen Z do start evaluating, then a diploma in marketing is one option that will come in their mind. Often this choice is judged by perceived career outcomes, the credibility of the institution's brand, and the digital touchpoint experience, particularly as we enter this era of digitization where social media holds a crucial influence in shaping Gen Z aspirations.

A. Integration of Push–Pull Factors with Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Amongst undergraduate students taking an academic course, students' intention to enrol in an academic programme influenced by attitudes towards the course, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control is examined in relation to [3]. Attitudes are the assessments students make of the programme and the expected benefit of it, subjective norms are attitudes of significant others, such as family members and peers, while perceived behavioural control is the students' confidence in the ability to pursue the programme.

Beyond these behavioural variables, there is also a possible influence of individual motivation and external institutional factors on students' decisions in terms of enrolment. In this research the perceived career value is an internal motivation (push factor) that shapes students' attitudes towards a Diploma in Marketing and represents a push factor that leads students' desire to aspire to Diploma in Marketing. Students who see career opportunities are the ones most inclined to consider what a strong career prospect and skill opportunity exists for skills training in a programme are also more likely to hold a favourable opinion of the course of study.

B. Enrolment Decision in Diploma in Marketing (Intention)

In the dependent variable, it has defined the outcome which measures whether Gen Z students intend to enrol, the probability that they will enrol or if they have already enrolled in a Diploma in Marketing course. It is the final decision point in a series of push and pull factors. Differences will exist in the relationship between intentions and perceived behavioural control in behaviour prediction in various situations and in different behaviours [3]. In conclusion, the student interest in specific academic programs is seen as one of the significant determinants of the graduate enrolment choice [4]. The relative significance of these determinants will differ between contexts, but intention is a significant predictor of the actual behaviour to enrol. Therefore, the dependent variable defined is Gen Z's enrolment decision in marketing programs measured by intention.

***Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Social media influence, perceived career value, peer and family recommendations, and institutional digital marketing collectively have a significant positive effect on Gen Z's enrolment decision in diploma in marketing programs.*

C. Social Media Influence

The independent variable measured by this study defines the extent to which Gen Z's exposure to specific platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube impacts their educational choices. Gen Z spend a significantly larger percentage of their time on social media, making social media a more relatable and engaging form of content. Social media marketing helps to develop institutional brand image and engage potential students through interactive content like video reviews, motivational content, and career path narratives [4]. Your higher education institution reminds people who have already visited your website that you can still reach them [4] with targeting. Social media marketing is a successful initiative of building institutional brand image and engaging prospective students and has been recognized as one of the effective approaches that could be based on [6] in achieving positive branding of the institution. Enrolment is stimulated by social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (with content such as guides, video reviews,

motivational videos, and day in the life of a career path). Social media increases visibility and leads students to participate with 70.77% considering it key for institutional info as mentioned in [5]. Social media influence contributes to increasing students' intention for a Diploma in Marketing by improving visibility and trust.

***Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Social media influence has a significant positive effect on Gen Z's enrolment decision in diploma in marketing programs.*

D. Perceived Career Value

The definition considers the extent to which respondents perceive that a Diploma in Marketing will increase the student's chances of being employable, advancing, and having the financial means to fulfill their professional role. When selecting a marketing diploma, students consider career prospects such as job opportunities, salaries, and skill relevance where both the students and parents consider high employability to be an important factor [7]. Positive attitudes toward enrolment are enhanced by well-rated career value scores. Therefore, the rise of students' enrolment in diploma in marketing will occur when the trends of career path for marketing and job opportunities for marketing students are widely known as to dispel insecurities towards a marketing course.

***Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Perceived career value has a significant positive effect on Gen Z's enrolment decision in diploma in marketing programs.*

E. Peer & Family Recommendations

The influence of friends, family, and peer networks on a decision to enrol is a pull factor; Gen Z will seek social validation and will require close ones to act as support. Participants of [9] research suggest that the supportive and communicative relationship with parents influences their views and intentions of future careers. Peers are normative standards that make college enrolment highly likely to happen, which means that when classmates have educated parents or similar backgrounds, enrolment is more likely. It demonstrates the way family shape the choice of institutions, what courses should be taken, institutions' reputation and employability later in life. These recommendations, as subjective norms in the [3], serve as a pull factor, thus increasing enrolment probability.

***Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Peer and Family recommendations has a significant positive effect*

on Gen Z's enrolment decision in diploma in marketing programs.

F. Institutional Digital Marketing

The digital marketing footprint of some academic institutions determines the success of online advertisement, website and digital campaign. According to [5], that attracting a larger proportion of the students involves the efficient use of digital marketing strategies, such that the students tend to spend more time using their gadgets as a way of alleviating time-tiredness induced by isolating themselves at home like following friends and trends on social media and browsing Internet. Based on [4], the marketing strategy of digital technology is pivotal in shaping the student's choice of enrolment in higher learning in a competitive university environment. In this sense, institutions take a targeted digital approach in search of, and engaging in, student recruitment. To improve awareness and their applications for marketing diplomas, universities use SEO, webinars, retargeting and mobile apps [6]. where it illustrates an effect between engagement with digital content and enrolled enrolment. So creating interest in the process that is greater than real-time decisions. In addition, an extensive digital marketing presence increases

perceived behaviour control as informative information is readily available and users engage interactively.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Institutional digital marketing has a significant positive effect on Gen Z's enrolment decision in diploma in marketing programs.

Below is the Conceptual Framework used where it shows what independent variable influences the dependent variable.

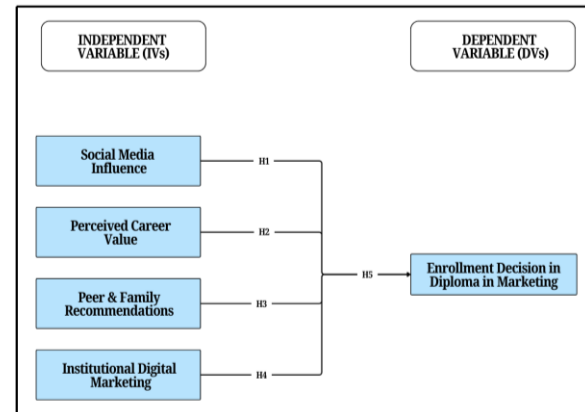


FIGURE 1.0

Conceptual Framework where Social Media Influence, Perceived Career Value, Peer & Family Recommendations, Institutional Digital Marketing influence Enrolment Decision in Diploma in Marketing.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

A quantitative research design based on the cross-sectional survey approach is adopted in this study to identify the push and pull factors that determine Generation Z learners' enrollment decision for a Diploma in Marketing program. Quantitative research is specifically numerical, focusing on collecting numbers that are analyzed in order to find and analyze associations, patterns, and trends. This methodology is used in a variety of fields like social sciences, healthcare, education, market analysis [12]. The current study follows a survey approach to gather this information, quantifying students' opinions and behaviours towards choosing a diploma programme. To capture student opinions effectively, researchers often utilize structured survey questionnaires, as demonstrated by [6] in their study of tertiary enrolment decisions.

B. Population and Sample

The target population is students 17 to 19, studying Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), and SPM graduates who are considering post-secondary education options such as Diploma programs. This cohort is relevant as they are the primary decision-makers for choosing marketing-related diplomas. A total of 300 respondents were gathered during two to three weeks. This number is consistent with the general guidance by [13] that sample sizes of 30 to 500 are usually sufficient for behavioural studies. So this 300 of data is gathered to make sure the pattern is easy to spot, yet still manageable for the nature of this diploma-based program. Non-probability convenience sampling was used for the study

with respondents recruited because of their availability and voluntary participation. Consistent with [13], because it is simple to administer, this study used convenience sampling. This enables the collection of the data quickly without the logistical challenges of complex randomization steps, which can be of great advantage in student projects with restricted time and resource.

C. Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study is a structured questionnaire. The survey is divided into two main sections:

Section A: Demographic Profile

This section gathers background data for classifying respondents. Background information is collected to ensure that the survey results are relevant and accurate. Demographic profiles are necessary as they provide context for participants by identifying attributes like age, gender, and level of education. They allow cross-tabulations of respondents and show differences in replies [14], allowing subgroup analysis and thus also its generality. This personalization not only helps in tailoring the questions to resonate with the respondents but also increases the likelihood of receiving meaningful data for the study.

Section A includes five items which is gender, age, current education level, academic stream during SPM, and intended course to pursue after SPM.

Section B: Push and Pull Factors

This part quantifies the specific influencing factors to an enrolment decision. It is based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scale was selected because of the ease with which respondents will come to understand and because there is a neutral midpoint to reduce the threat of forced choice bias [13]. If these opinions are valued numerically, the researcher has numerical insight to identify those marketing strategies which had the greatest influence on the Gen Z enrolment decisions. We take a Likert scale measure to provide a quantitative analysis of student's feedback and agreement with measures like in the following statement: "Marketing-related content on social media increases my interest in studying marketing".

D. Data Analysis Method

When the data collection process is completed, all responses will be analysed by Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Excel is used for initial data preparation and the organisation of the data and SPSS is used for detailed statistical analysis, because it is a widely used system to manage social science data [15]. The following three techniques will be used for the analysis:

1. Frequency and Percentage Analysis. This methodology is mainly going to be utilized for Section A (Demographics). It assists in summarizing how many people are in each category (what proportion of the sample is female, or from a specific stream of SPM).

2. Mean Score Analysis. This is the most important part for Section B (Push and Pull Factors). The average (mean) of each statement can allow the study to rank factors from most to least influential. Calculation of mean is a good way to find the central tendency in Likert-type data and determine the significance of individual variables by finding the mean [17].

- A High Mean (e.g., 4.20 – 5.00) indicates a factor that strongly pulls Gen Z toward the diploma program.
- A Low Mean (e.g., 1.00 – 2.40) indicates a factor that has little to no impact.

3. Descriptive Statistics Overall. These descriptive statistics provide a clear overview of the data, allowing the researcher to identify general trends and patterns in Gen Z's enrollment behavior without needing overly complex mathematical models.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Respondent Profile (Demographic Analysis)

Age Group analysis of respondents

By age, most participants have been aged into traditional school-leaving or early college going age groups (as reported in a demographic analysis). The 17-18 years old group accounts for the largest part of the number, accounting for over half of respondents. Next are 15-16 years old and 19-20 years old. It's only a small minority of participants, few are 21 years old and above. These results shed light on important facts about the target population and confirm that data is mainly representative of Gen Z who are currently at the critical decision-making

stage regarding their higher education and diploma program enrolment.

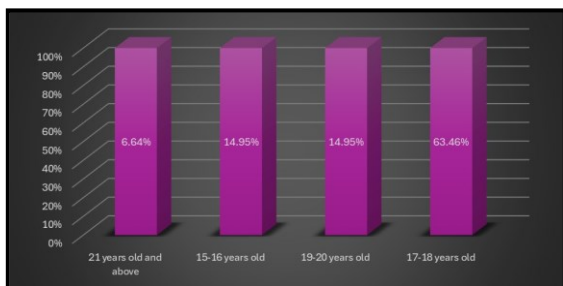


FIGURE 2.0.1.

Age Group Analysis of Respondents

Gender Analysis of respondents

Based on gender, the demographic analysis of respondents shows an almost equal split between the two demographic groups. The sample has a balanced demographic: Male and Female are almost evenly represented in the sample, and each gender accounts for approximately half of the sample. It illustrates a rich range of gender perspectives in the study. These results shed important light on the target population and confirm that the data provides a comprehensive picture of Gen Z decisions regarding their enrolments whether male or female. By balancing the "Push" and "Pull" variables studied in this work, the latter are representative of male and female students entering higher education.

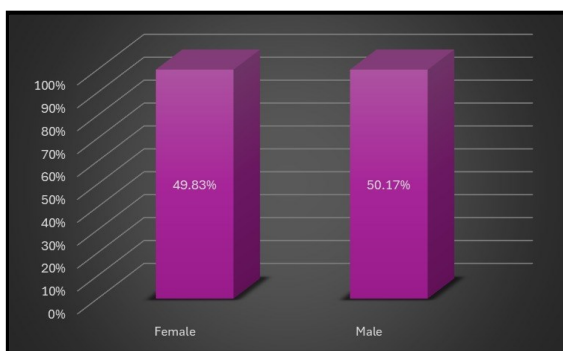


FIGURE 2.0.2.

Gender Analysis of Respondents

Current Education Level of Respondents

Demographic analysis of the respondents as to their current status shows that a majority of participants are currently at the SPM level of education. Next are students in Secondary School and those studying for a Diploma. A smaller proportion of the sample consists of students from Foundation and STPM backgrounds. Finally, the study demonstrates important aspects of the target population

confirming the majority of their data are from students who are at the peak of their tertiary education decision-making process. More particularly, the high proportion of SPM and secondary school students (these are the primary target market for a Diploma in Marketing course) makes this study relevant to all these areas and therefore justifies the relevance of this study for this population, whose demographic as the target market would therefore be the majority of students in this course.

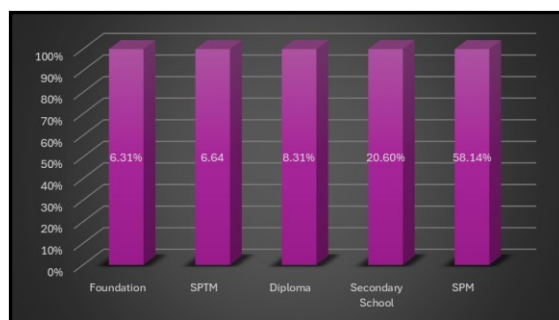


FIGURE 2.0.3.

Current Education Level of Respondents

Academic Stream During SPM Analysis

After analyzing the demographics of the respondents by their academic stream during SPM, the majority of participants were recruited from the Commerce Stream (Perdagangan / Akaun / Perniagaan) and the Pure Science (Sains Tulen) stream. Next are the Science Stream (Sains Gunaan / Sains Teknikal) and the Arts Stream (Sastera / Kemanusiaan). Other participants are Religious, Technical/Vocational (TVET), and Sports Science backgrounds, are categorized under others. These results shed light on key aspects of the student population for the Diploma in Marketing, indicating that the interest towards this degree is strongest among business and science-based students. The high representation across both commerce and science streams explains the wide-ranging appeal of the marketing program, indicating that Gen Z students from diverse academic tracks see marketing as a desirable field for their tertiary education.

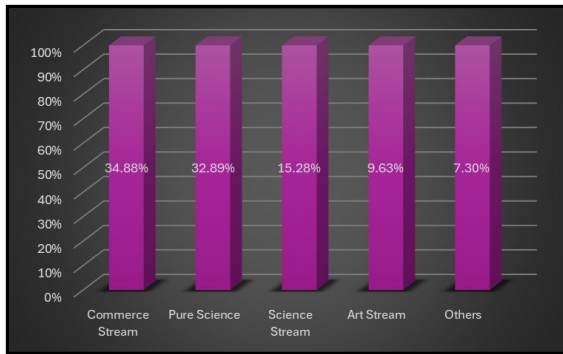


FIGURE 2.0.4.

Academic Stream During SPM Analysis

Analysis of Intended Course of Study After SPM

The demographic analysis of respondents regarding courses they plan to pursue after SPM shows that the majority of participants are interested in those related to Accounting & Finance and Business & Marketing. Respondents' interest encompasses mainly two fields, with other disciplines classified as others, such as Education, Science & Technology, and Engineering. These insights clarify key insights into the target population as indicated by the fact that the interviewees have a clear pre-existing tendency towards business-focused disciplines. Accounting, finance, and marketing all have strong interest and justify the research focus, as this demonstrates that the target Gen Z demographic is already inclined to decide on a Diploma in Marketing as the first choice for higher education.

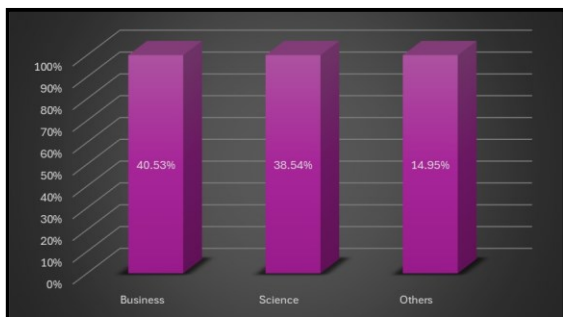


FIGURE 2.0.5.

Analysis of Intended Course of Study After SPM

A. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF VARIABLES

Dependent variable

1) I intend to enrol in a Diploma in Marketing program.

Number	Valid	301
	Missing	0
Mean		3.95

Table 2.0.1.

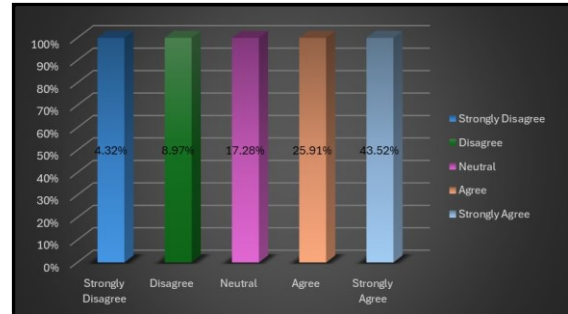


FIGURE 2.0.6.

Shows the result for "I intend to enroll in a Diploma in Marketing program".

A total of 301 respondents showed high intentions on the 'I intend to enrol in a Diploma in Marketing program' statement, with the mean score of 3.95. That is further verified by Figure 2.0.6. which shows that 69.43 percent of the sample either 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' to the statement. The research indicates the 'Push' and 'Pull' determinants have a significant impact on Gen Z academic preferences towards marketing.

2) I am likely to recommend a Diploma in Marketing program to my friends.

Number	Valid	299
	Missing	2
Mean		4.03

Table 2.0.2.

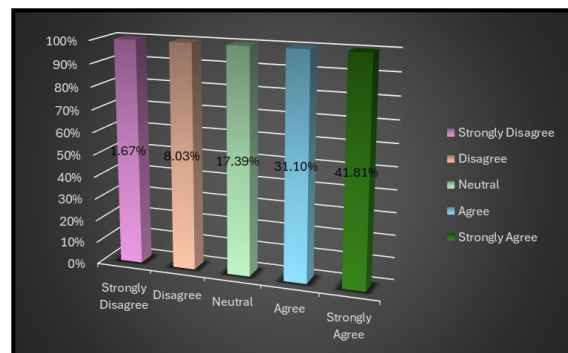


FIGURE 2.0.7.

Shows the result for "I am likely to recommend a Diploma in Marketing program to my friends".

The mean score from the statement "I am likely to recommend a Diploma in Marketing program to my friends" was 4.03, indicating a very high degree of recommendation intention among 299 respondents. This is also supported by the data in the bar chart that shows most of the sample (72.91%) either "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" with the statement. These results suggest a positive sentiment toward the program, which is consistent with the degree of success of the determinants of marketing education perceived by Gen Z.

Independent Variable

1) Social media platforms influence my decision when choosing a study program.

Number	Valid	301
	Missing	0
Mean		4.36

Table 2.0.3.

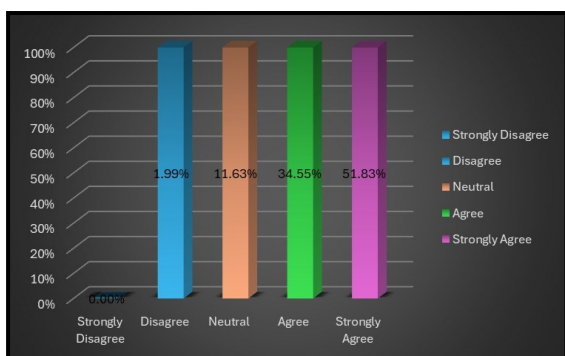


FIGURE 2.0.8.

Shows the result for "Social media platforms influence my decision when choosing a study program".

The average score for the statement "Social media platforms influence my choice of study programme" was 4.36, indicating a high influence among the 301 respondents. This is also supported by the data presented in the bar chart, which shows that most of the sample (86.38%) answered either "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" with the statement. The findings indicate that social media is an important part of Gen Z's academic program selection decision process.

2) Reviews or experiences shared by students on social media affect my enrolment decision.

Number	Valid	301
	Missing	0
Mean		4.33

Table 2.0.4.

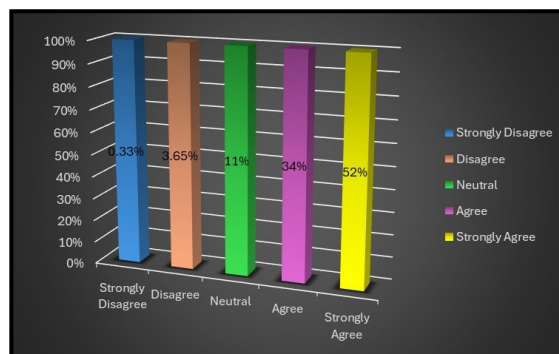


FIGURE 2.0.9.

Shows the result for "Reviews or experiences shared by students on social media affect my enrolment decision".

The mean score for the statement "Reviews or experiences shared by students on social media affect my enrolment decision" was 4.33, which suggests that the 301 respondents felt strongly influenced by the statement. As indicated in the bar chart, 85.38% of the sample either "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" with the statement. Taken together, these findings indicate peer-generated content, combined with shared experiences on social platforms, is a strong influencer influencing Gen Z's final decision to enrol.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a clear picture of the factors influencing Gen Z's enrolment in marketing programs. Even though this research relies on descriptive analysis, the results offer significant insights into the decision-making patterns of modern students.

Interpretation of Findings

The most interesting finding is that the average score for social media platform influence is quite high (M = 4.36). This means that Gen Z students can be called to becoming "digital natives" who are using almost solely social platforms for education information about their future.

Finally, the high mean score for student reviews and experiences (M = 4.33) indicates that „peer-to-peer“ trust can be assumed in

educational marketing for the present era. This jibes with a recent study showing 94% of Gen Z people trust their peers more than their corporate ads, as their support is real social proof.

Implications for the Organization/Industry

These findings indicate that static marketing is not enough for colleges and universities nowadays. Universities should engage the commerce and science stream students, who expressed the strongest interest in this study, by addressing the following factors:

- **Student Ambassadors:** As peer reviews are highly valued ($M = 4.33$), real students will be the “face” of the marketing campaign to ensure the social proof that Gen Z seeks.
- **Shift Attention to Digital Content:** Marketing budgets should shift toward more interactive social media content that speaks to Gen Z’s preferences since these platforms now serve as the students’ primary decision-making tools.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Summary of Main Findings.

The study finds that Social Media Influence is the largest “Pull” factor, with 86.38% of students accepting the influence on their decision making. The results further support a very positive feeling towards marketing as indicated by an average recommendation intent of 4.03. Students can be found from various academic faculties; yet those studying Commerce and Pure Science streams are the most fertile market for marketing programs.

B. Importance of the Study.

The relevance of this research lies in the efforts of Malaysian universities to maintain enrolment figures in a competitive environment. It is an incontrovertible fact that peer-led digital content is no longer a nice option, it is a necessity to reach SPM leavers effectively.

C. Implications

This study offers useful insights for universities interested in attracting marketing students of the future. The high impact of social media in the data is important for practical as well as managerial actions.

D. Practical Implication

As a practical issue, 86.38% of the respondents reported being influenced by social media. This suggests educational entities should not utilize common print brochures but invest heavily in short-form video content such as TikTok/Reels as well as more user-created content. For a high mean peer reviews of 4.33, the “practical” solution would be to create programs of student-led digital tours along with “day-in-the-life” content that offer the social proof that Gen Z seeks.

E. Managerial Implication

For management they indicate a change in the way budgets are put to work and who is hired. Marketing managers should:

- **Redirect Funds:** Shift a lot of the recruitment budget from offline events to partnerships with digital influencers.
- **Leverage Academic Tracks:** Given that the Science and commerce students were the highest level of interest, managers should work to tailor the messaging to illustrate how a Diploma in Marketing can fit into that area of study.
- **Monitor Peer Sentiments:** Because peer reviews are so influential ($M=4.33$), management must actively monitor and manage the institution’s online reputation and student testimonials.

F. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is useful in so far as it offers a good summary of the issues affecting Gen Z students’ motives for entering the Diploma in Marketing programme, however the study poses issues that should be addressed. The objectives of this study are to identify perceived career value as an influential internal motivator of students. Career-related elements are well-known as a prominent determinant of which programmes people are interested in, but there could also be some other driving factors e.g. interest in marketing, a love for creativity or wishing to develop digital marketing skills. In future studies, the inclusion of different motivation criteria could improve the understanding of internal student decision processes. Second, this study is rooted on the theoretical orientation of TPB. A few indicators studied

in this study are aspects of behavioural attitudes and social influence. However, in this particular research, a more integrative operationalisation of TPB constructs will be required in future studies on how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control combined affect students' enrolment intentions. Third, this study mainly uses descriptive data to search for patterns of students' responses. In future research studies, this work could be further developed by applying higher-level statistical approaches, such as regression analysis or structural modelling, to analyze the relationships between push factors, pull factors and enrolment intentions of students. Overall, a wider range in the motivational dimension and analytical approaches that can be utilized for studies in the future might provide a more complete insight on the way Generation Z students analyse and select academic programmes that are relevant to marketing.

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AUTHOR'S INFORMATION

<p>Name: Sharifah Zalia Latisha Bt. Syed Ezanee Zulfakhri</p> 	<p>Students of Kolej Professional MARA Seri Iskandar, <i>Lot PT 2635, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Bota, Malaysia, 32600 Bota, Perak Darul Ridzuan.</i></p> <p>Email: sharifahzalia0106@gmail.com</p>
<p>Name : Khairyna Ayra Bt. Muhammad Yazid</p> 	<p>Students of Kolej Professional MARA Seri Iskandar, <i>Lot PT 2635, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Bota, Malaysia, 32600 Bota, Perak Darul Ridzuan.</i></p> <p>Email: ayrakhairy@gmail.com</p>
<p>Name: Batrisya Sofea Bt. Jazlan</p> 	<p>Students of Kolej Professional MARA Seri Iskandar, <i>Lot PT 2635, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Bota, Malaysia, 32600 Bota, Perak Darul Ridzuan.</i></p> <p>Email: batrisyasofea07@gmail.com</p>
<p>Name: Faiznur Iman Bt. Marhaen</p>	<p>Students of Kolej Professional MARA Seri Iskandar, <i>Lot PT 2635, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Bota, Malaysia, 32600 Bota,</i></p>

	<p><i>Perak Darul Ridzuan.</i></p> <p>Email: faiznr iman@gmail.com</p>
<p>Name: Norliza Bt. Ramli</p> 	<p>Marketing Department, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Perak <i>Lot PT 2635, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Bota, Malaysia, 32600 Bota, Perak Darul Ridzuan.</i></p> <p>E-mail: norliza.ramli@mara.gov.my</p>
<p>Name: Noor Fareeza Bt. Azmi</p> 	<p>Business Management Department, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Perak <i>Lot PT 2635, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Bota, Malaysia, 32600 Bota, Perak Darul Ridzuan.</i></p> <p>E-mail: fareeza.azmi@mara.gov.my</p>