

Behavioral Patterns of SPM Graduates in Choosing a Marketing Diploma: A Comprehensive Analysis of Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar

Nurfikriyah Auni¹, Siti Nurhuda Salsabila², Khairunnisa' Solehah³, Nur Damia Insyirah⁴,
Norliza binti Ramli⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Marketing Department, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar

E-mail: fikriyahauni06@gmail.com, nurhudasalsabila08@gmail.com, nisxsol@gmail.com, svirahisyam148@gmail.com,
norliza.ramli@mara.gov.my

Abstract

The Malaysian marketing and business sectors are currently undergoing a rapid transformation from digital branding and entrepreneurship, which has created a high demand for skilled young professionals. Despite this industry growth, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar (KPMSI) faces a persistent challenge where Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) graduates are increasingly discarding specialized marketing diplomas in favor of alternative academic paths or direct entry into the labor market. This study aims to investigate the underlying factors contributing to this low enrollment and evaluate how students perceive the program's value. Specifically, the research objectives include examining the influence of career expectations, industry awareness, and personal interests on the decision-making patterns of school leavers. Through an adopted descriptive research design, data was collected through an online survey with 310 respondents from SPM graduates. The results revealed that Family Influence (Mean = 3.77) was the only factor reaching a high level of agreement while other variables remained moderate. This indicated that family validation is the primary driver of student choice. The study concluded that KPMSI must recalibrate its marketing to target the family unit, specifically highlighting the professional security and prestige associated with the CPM (Asia) designation to build parental trust.

Keywords: Behavior of SPM Graduates; Business sector; Diploma in Marketing; Marketing; SPM Graduates

I. INTRODUCTION

The decision to transit from secondary to tertiary education involves a rather complicated evaluation of future career goals [1]. Hence, there are number of interpersonal factors which contribute majorly. Over the years, a Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) has served in the definitive benchmark for academic aptitude and thus, the subsequent pathways available for students as they seek to navigate education [2]. However, the contemporary Malaysian education landscape is facing a seminal crisis of engagement. Recent government statistics reveal a total behavioral shift where 390,000 out of 560,000 SPM candidates (approximately 72.1%) express no intentions of furthering their education, and rather, join the labor market immediately [3]. This trend is particularly noticeable in fields like marketing, where the barrier to entry is perceived low. This phenomenon shows the changes in values in society and the losses of the traditional diplomas in academics as many school leavers view higher education as the hardest way if it does not guarantee them high paying jobs. Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar (KPMSI) as a specialized institution

under the MARA Higher Education Division (BPT), plays a significant role in the national mission to increase the number of Bumiputera professionals in business, accounting, and information technology. Within this context, the Diploma in Marketing plus CPM program was designed as a high value offering, combining academic study with the prestigious Certified Professional Marketer (Asia) designation [4]. Under normal circumstances, such a program is tailored to the needs of industry. Yet, KPMSI has experienced a steady decline in the number of new students, especially those in the business stream. The inconsistency between industry growth and educational enrollment suggests a serious behavioral misalignment. SPM graduates today are digital natives who interact with marketing daily through TikTok and Instagram [5]. Paradoxically, this level of in-depth knowledge may lead to the perception that marketing is "general knowledge" that can be acquired via free online platforms like YouTube, without having to obtain a formal diploma [6]. To understand why school leavers are choosing these alternative paths, one has to look at psychological constructions first that drive decision making. The process of choosing a higher

education program does not happen by chance but follows a three-phase model comprising of aptitude, search, and choice [2]. Currently, many Malaysian students get delayed in the search state or diverted by dilemmas like low graduate's starting salary and family financial obligations. This report, therefore, based on Ajzen (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior as applicable, after defining the problem, identifying the key variables and constructing the relevant conceptual framework, offers the relevant analytical implements to re-set the promotional strategy [7],

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature on TVET and diploma-level education in Malaysia consistently highlights issues with public perception, discrepancies between industry demand and TVET or diploma outputs, and the potential of structured frameworks to improve employability and career advancement for SPM-level graduates. In various studies, changes in policy like Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN) for TVET pathway or Certified Professional Marketer (CPM) for a diploma in Marketing as competency-based standards. This interacts with students, parents, and stakeholder attitudes to shape how SPM graduates view them as viable routes. This decision-making process can be analyzed through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) where policy reforms and industry alignment function as external factors that shape a graduate's internal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control [8].

A. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), originally developed by Ajzen (1991) and applied that assumes an individual decision to perform a given behavior, forms the broad framework for this study [7]. In this case, enrolling in Diploma in Marketing is determined by their 'Behavioral Intention', which acts as the most immediate predictor of whether a student will commit to a specific study path [2]. These are the three pillars that shape the intention. First, Attitude toward the Behavior refers to the specific degree of a student's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of pursuing a marketing diploma. Stakeholders' emphasis on diplomas as legitimate routes to employment or further study affects student attitudes. When diplomas are framed as pathways with clear articulation to higher qualification or to direct employment, students may form more favorable attitudes toward diploma options [9]. Second, Subjective Norm, accounts for the perceived social pressure from significant others such as parents and relatives, who may encourage or discourage enrollment in the program. Expectations from family and society greatly impact decisions made after SPM. Studies conducted in the Netherlands and France indicate that parental education and socio-economic status influence the

pathways students take in tertiary education, highlighting societal expectations that direct students toward or away from degrees and universities [10]. Finally, Perceived Behavioral Control touches on the inner perception that a student has in relation to ease or difficulty associated with successfully completing the academic program, especially when considering formal education against informal learning methods. This means once students view diploma programs as attainable with clear routes to additional education or jobs, their desire to enroll will increase [11].

B. Choice of Program Enrollment (DV)

The Choice of Program is the final behavioral characteristic of choice after graduates decide to enroll in the Diploma in Marketing + CPM at Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar [2]. Graduates first develop a general aptitude for learning, with which they then evaluate various academic programs in a related manner. Choosing here is critical as it forms the basis of recruitment success and intake figures for the institution. There are specific forces at work that primarily determine program choice academically, internally, and socially. Hence, such elements need to be analysed to understand why students arrive at such a choice as a final one.

C. Academic Qualification (IV 1)

Academic Qualification refers to the degree or certification earned, which is an important external credential that has an impact on the future employability of a student [2]. Students typically use their SPM results as a benchmark to identify which professional pathways are open, achievable, and channelized towards their career goal. This factor is important for school leavers that see a diploma as a necessary 'key' to enter the corporate workforce. While formal credentials supply the necessary 'key' to enter into the labor force, a student's internal passion for the subject dictates their level of adherence to the course

***Hypothesis 1 (H1):** There is a significant positive relationship between a student's academic qualification and their intention to choose the Diploma in Marketing.*

D. Personal Interest (IV 2)

Personal Interest is defined as a student's pure passion and endogenous interest towards a particular subject which works as a potent academic success motivator [12]. In marketing, students who see themselves as creative or innovative will be more satisfied with a curriculum focused on branding and digital strategy. Personal Interest is a predictor of whether a student will lose interest in the studies or remain focused until the end of the course. Despite personal passion being a strong internal motivator,

comments from important people in a student's life provide external pressure for the student to make a choice.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *The study posits a significant positive relationship between personal interest and the intention to choose the program.*

E. Family Influence (IV 3)

Family Influence considers the effect of parents and other close relatives who traditionally offer the emotional and financial support necessary to pursue higher education [1]. In Malaysia, parents often act as the primary "significant others" guiding children towards programs that they deem to have high prestige and job security. Alignment of expectations between a family and a student is a big part of the subjective norms that influence enrollment behavior.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *There is a significant positive relationship between family influence and the intention to choose the Diploma in Marketing.*

F. Social Media Influence (IV 4)

Social Media Influence is defined as the effect of influences and trending topics on the career perceptions of the digital-natives graduate [13]. As they spend significant time on TikTok and Instagram, they are subjected to the new norms which highlight informal learning or the gig economy as more efficient than formal diplomas. This variable is particularly significant for marketing programs, as it causes school leavers to compromise formal academic education for instant gratification of monetary rewards.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): *There is a significant positive relationship between social media influence and the intention to choose the diploma.*

Figure 1.0 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study which maps the relationship between the Independent Variables (IV) and the Dependent Variable (DV). The Dependent Variable is the researcher to identify the majority trends within the sample, such as the gender distribution or the most Choice of Program (Enrollment in Marketing Diploma). The Independent Variables include Academic Qualification, Personal Interest, Family Influence, and Social Media Influence. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, these variables represent the psychological and social constructs that determine the behavioral intention of SPM graduates to pursue formal education at KPMSI.

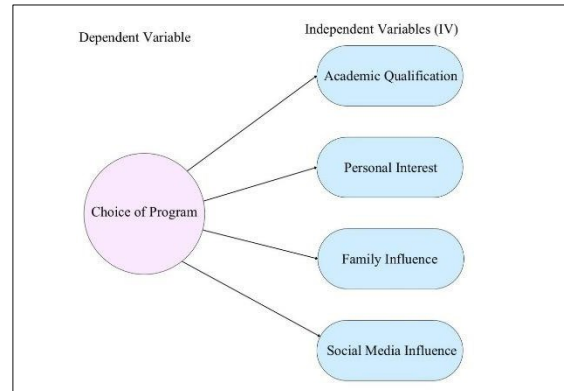


Figure 1.0: Theoretical Framework based on Theory of Planned Behaviour

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative research method to investigate thoroughly determine the relationship between the students' choice of academic programs. By using numerical data to identify patterns, trends, and relationships through statistical testing, accuracy, and reliability of the data is ensured during the analysis phase. The methodology is designed to present action-oriented, data-driven conclusions as part of a representative summary of students' attitude with minimal risks of data instability.

A. Research Design

First and foremost, the chosen research design is a survey method specifically designed for collecting quantitative data from the target population. Data collection is done through an online survey using Google Forms which is the main tool to reach respondents efficiently.

B. Population and Sample

The target respondents for this study are the SPM school leavers and the business stream cohorts. A convenience sampling method was identified to select 310 respondents. The sample size is therefore taken to justify and provide for an exceptionally robust and reliable foundation of data that are to powerfully support the primary objectives of the study.

C. Data Analysis

The data collected from the 310 respondents via Google Form will be processed and analysed using Microsoft Excel (or SPSS) to ensure accuracy and systematic organization. Since this study is mostly focused on student perceptions and factors involved in decision-making. Descriptive Statistical Analysis will be the grand means of interpreting the findings. First, a frequency and percentage analysis will be done for the demographic profile under Section A and the items under general awareness. Secondly, for the variables in Section B (Choice of Program,

Academic Qualification, Personal Interest, Family Influence, and Social Media Influence), a mean score will be done.

Construct	Key Sources
Choice of Program (DV)	[2]
Academic Qualification (IV 1)	[2], [17], [19]
Personal Interest (IV2)	[12]
Family Influence (IV3)	[1], [2], [14]
Social Media Influence (IV4)	[13], [14]

Table 1.0: Adopted instruments by scholar

The mean values will be gotten for each item to give the average level of agreement amongst respondents using the 5-point Likert scale. This systematic ranking will show which of the factors would have more influence on the decision to enrol in the program.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data collected from the quantitative survey among SPM leavers regarding their enrollment decisions for the Diploma in Marketing at KPMSI. This analysis focuses on descriptive statistics, specifically providing a clear overview of the respondent profiles and the key variables influencing their choices using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores.

Mean Score Ratings	Interpretation
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.67	Average
3.68 – 5.00	High

Table 2.0: Mean Scores for Independent Variables

The analysis for this item recorded a mean score of 3.77 which indicates a high level of agreement among respondents. This high score is driven by the fact that many respondents strongly agreed with the statement, while another 29.1% agreed. Only a very small minority strongly disagreed. The data shows high level influence as predicted, H3 is accepted. Family opinion is a high-influence factor, the impact of family, expectations from parents, and collaborative decision-making between parents and students are consistently emphasized as factors influencing the choice of higher institution in global settings [20]. Marketing strategies should not just target the students but should create promotional content specific for parents to demonstrate the value and career security of the marketing program as their approval.

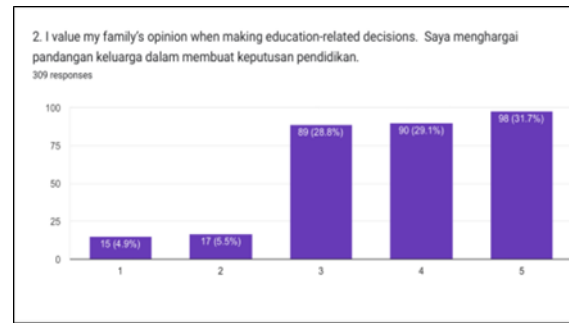


Figure 2.0: Result for Independent Variable (Family Influence)

A comparison of the mean scores reveals a gap between internal interest and external pressure. While Personal Interest shows students have a moderate attraction to creative fields, it is significantly lower than Family Influence that frequently functions via prestige signalling and societal expectations as parents' resources, status interests, and the anticipated social benefits of specific fields influence the student's perceived worth of a particular major [21]. This aligns with conversations regarding parental impact on college selection and the significance of family resources in guiding students toward elite fields or schools [22]. In situations where the branding and prestige of certain fields are prominent such as accounting and IT, families may guide students towards those areas as pathways for elevated status and more explicit labour-market use [23].

Variable	Mean	Interpretation
Choice of Program (DV)	3.07	Average
Academic Qualification (IV 1)	3.42	Average
Personal Interest (IV 2)	3.60	Average
Family Influence (IV 3)	3.77	High
Social Media Influence (IV 4)	3.53	Average

Table 3.0: Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

V. CONCLUSION

This study points to an important mismatch between the increasing demands placed on the marketing industry within Malaysia and the current enrolment trends of SPM graduates within Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar (KPMSI). As the marketing industry demands more skilled professionals in digital branding and entrepreneurship, the results show that student choice is not influenced by such expectations and trends. Rather, Family Influence

was found to be the most important factor indicating that traditional social groups are more important than marketing trends in the academic decisions of school leavers. It is important to note the limitations of the current study to contextualize the findings and their implications for further research. First, this study only used descriptive analysis, concentrating on mean scores, and frequency distributions to characterize respondent perceptions, is a major drawback. Although this method successfully pinpoints prevailing trends, the strength and significance of the casual relationships between variables cannot be statistically measured. To provide a more thorough validation of the hypotheses, it is highly recommended that future researchers make use of inferential statistics such as multiple regression analysis or Pearson correlation. Furthermore, increasing the sample size to encompass a wider geographic range of SPM graduates from various Malaysian states would improve the results' generalizability outside of the study's current parameters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, sincere appreciation is extended to the management of Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar (KPMSI) for supporting and financing this research. Their commitment to encourage academic initiatives in enabling this study to be carried out successfully. Gratitude is also extended to the Bahagian Pendidikan Tinggi MARA (BPTM) for their continuous support and dedication in empowering marketing lecturers and Diploma in Marketing students to contribute meaningfully to academic research and scholarly publication. The authors are also deeply indebted to our advisor, Norliza binti Ramli for her invaluable guidance, constant encouragement, and insightful feedback throughout the development of this paper. Finally, appreciation is extended to all individuals who have directly and indirectly supported this research. Their encouragement and support have been invaluable in the completion of this study.

REFERENCES





- [1] Rahman, N. H. A., Samad, K. A., & Phong, S. Y. A Review on Post COVID-19 Pandemic towards Tertiary Education and Graduate Employability in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(11). 2022.
- [2] Mohamadin, M. I., Julaihi, N. H., & Universiti Teknologi MARA. Factors Influencing the Choice of Higher Education Institution and Diploma Programme among Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Students [Journal-article]. *International Journal of Service Management and Sustainability*, 1–24, 2023.
- [3] Utusan, Department of Statistics, University of Perlis, The Sun, Malaysian Productivity Corporation, & The Star. "72% of SPM graduates prefer to be influencers, E-Hailing drivers than pursuing higher education," in *The Rakyat Post*, 2022.
- [4] Asia Marketing Federation (AMF), Certified Professional Marketer (Asia): Professional Standards and Competency Framework, 2024.
- [5] Merino, M., et al., "Career aspirations among Malaysian youth: A qualitative study on the influence of TikTok," in *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management*, 7(26),112-129, 2024.
- [6] Punzalan, J., "The impact of formal digital learning on formal education perceptions among Gen Z," in *Journal of Education & E-Learning Research*, 10(2), 154-162, 2023.
- [7] Robin, B., Ali, J. K., Abdullah, M., & Wahyuningsih, D. Extending the Theory of Planned Behavior: Entrepreneurial Intention among undergraduate students in Sarawak, Malaysia. *International Journal of Service Management and Sustainability*, 10(2), 1–13, 2025.
- [8] A. Ibrahim and I. Mat Nashir, "Demand-supply Mismatch in TVET Academic Programmes: What Is It and What Should It Be?," *Journal of Technical Education and Training*, vol. 14, no. 2, Sep. 2022.
- [9] S. Field, P. Musset, and José-Luis Álvarez-Galván, *A Skills beyond School Review of South Africa*. 2014.
- [10] J. Polcyn and M. Gawrysiak, "Analysis Of Education System Financial Loss Based On Choices Of I Year Univeristy Students Coming From Vocational Secondary Schools In Northern Greater Poland," *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Oeconomica*, vol. 2, no. 20, pp. 24–36, Dec. 2018.
- [11] J. J. W. Powell, L. Graf, N. Bernhard, L. Coutrot, and A. Kieffer, "The Shifting Relationship between Vocational and Higher Education in France and Germany: towards convergence?," *European Journal of Education*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 405–423, Aug. 2012.
- [12] Authors. Factors influencing Malaysian students' choice of diploma programs: Analysing their interrelation with interest and satisfaction. In *International Journal of Service Management and Sustainability*, vol. 9 Issue 2, pp. 23–40, 2024
- [13] S. Wong, Wong Siew Chin, and Chui Seong Lim, "Predictive modeling of career choices among fresh graduates: application of model selection approach," *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, Dec. 2023.
- [14] Ahmad, N., & Ismail, S. "Decision dilemmas: Higher education pursuits or workforce entry among SPM graduates," in *International Journal of Management Studies*, 6(23), 190-223, 2023.
- [15] Hassan, M. S., & Ahmad, Z. "Subjective norms and the role of family in Malaysian higher education choices," in *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 21(1), 112-135, 2024.
- [16] Faculty of Hotel & Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA. (n.d.). *SPM leavers' motivation factors continuing study in hospitality program: an exploratory study / Haslinda Khalid, Nurfatimah Mazlan and Zurinawati Mohi - UiTM Institutional Repository*.
- [17] Meng, Q., & Zhang, Q., The Influence of Academic Self-Efficacy on University Students' Academic Performance: The Mediating Effect of Academic Engagement. *Sustainability*, 15(7), 5767, 2023.
- [18] Rapiza, P., Demographic Variations in confidence and career skills Preferences of ABM Strand Senior High school students. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 3(10), 372–379, 2025.
- [19] Lessky, F., & Unger, M., "Working long hours while studying: a higher risk for First-in-Family students and students of particular fields of study?" *European Journal of*

Higher Education, 13(3), 347–366, 2022.

100585, Apr. 2021.

- [20] B. Ghansah, B. B. Benuwa, E. K. Ansah, N. E. Ghansah, C. Magama, and E. N. N. Ocquaye, “Factors that Influence Students’ Decision to Choose a Particular University: A Conjoint Analysis,” *International Journal of Engineering Research in Africa*, vol. 27, pp. 147–157, Dec. 2016.
- [21] D. Zarifa, Y. Sano, and R. P. Milian, “Stratification in Countries with Flatter (Institutional) Hierarchies? Insights from Administrative Data in Canada,” *Sociology of Education*, Feb. 2025.
- [22] G. Pirzada, F. Gul, and M. A. Mahmood, “A Comparative Study of Students’ Perceptions about Career Options in Art & Design,” *Global Regional Review*, vol. VI, no. II, pp. 88–96, Jun. 2021.
- [23] M. Klein, “Who benefits from attending elite universities? Family background and graduates’ career trajectories,” *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, vol. 72, p

AUTHOR'S INFORMATION

<p>Advisor:</p>  <p>Norliza binti Ramli</p>	<p>Marketing Department, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Perak E-mail: norliza.ramli@mara.gov.my</p>
<p>First Author:</p>  <p>Nurfikriyah Auni binti Mohd Faizal</p>	<p>Diploma in Marketing, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Perak E-mail: fikriyyahauni06@gmail.com</p>
<p>Second Author:</p>  <p>Siti Nurhuda Salsabila binti Hairul-Hazani</p>	<p>Diploma in Marketing, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Perak E-mail: nurhudasalsabila08@gmail.com</p>
<p>Third Author:</p> <p>Third Author-</p>  <p>Khairunnisa' Solehah binti Jafri</p>	<p>Diploma in Marketing, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Perak E-mail: nisxsol@gmail.com</p>

Fourth Author:



**Nur Damia Insyirah
binti Mohd Norhisyam**

Diploma in Marketing, Kolej Profesional MARA Seri Iskandar, Perak

E-mail: syirahisyam148@gmail.com