Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi dan Bisnis
Vol. 23. No.1, Maret 2026: 22-36
EISSN : 2442 – 9813
ISSN : 1829 – 9822

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF MARKETING ON RPL ENROLLMENT DECISIONS: STUDENT INTEREST AS A DETERMINING FACTOR

Silmi Rinda Fitri[1*], Rumyeni[2], Lie Othman[3]

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Riau University [1,2,3]
E-mail : silmirindafitri@gmail.com*

accepted: 26/8/2025; revised: 19/3/2026; published: 31/3/2026

Abstract: The effectiveness of marketing communication in influencing enrollment decisions in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program remains underexplored, particularly regarding the mediating role of interest. Prospective students in this pathway tend to prioritize flexibility, cost, and relevance over traditional academic attributes, while prior studies have mainly focused on conventional admission contexts. This study employs a quantitative explanatory approach using survey data from 291 RPL learners, analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling with the Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) method. The results indicate that personal selling and social media marketing have significant direct effects on enrollment decisions, whereas sales promotion and advertising do not. However, all four elements of marketing communication demonstrate significant indirect effects through interest, which emerges as the strongest predictor of enrollment decisions. These findings support the Theory of Planned Behavior by highlighting the crucial role of interest as a mediator between marketing communication and decision-making. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on how integrated marketing communication influences enrollment in non-traditional higher education pathways and offers practical insights for developing more targeted, interest-driven promotional strategies.

Keywords: Marketing Communication, Personal Selling, Social Media Marketing, Advertising, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing competition in the higher education sector requires universities to go beyond simply maintaining the quality of their academic offerings and also focus on implementing effective communication approaches in marketing efforts to attract prospective students. Marketing communication serves an essential function in shaping the image of the institution, influencing public perception, as well as guiding students decision-making processes (Hajatina, 2024). This role becomes more critical in non-traditional educational pathways such as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program, where prospective students must clearly understand its distinctive benefits, procedures, and relevance compared to conventional admission routes.

The RPL program was introduced as a national policy to expand access to higher education by recognizing prior learning outcomes obtained through formal, non-formal, and professional experiences. This policy is implemented in accordance with government regulations formulated by the Ministry responsible for education, culture, research, and technology (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, 2021), which encourages universities to provide flexible learning pathways for individuals with work experience. As one of the institutions authorized to implement RPL, Universitas Lancang Kuning (UNILAK) provides a relevant context for examining how

marketing communication strategies influence participation in such programs.

However, despite supportive policies and relatively affordable tuition, enrollment in the RPL program at UNILAK has fluctuated over time. This circumstance shows that the program has not yet been widely understood by the public, partly due to insufficient dissemination of information. From a practical perspective, this indicates a potential gap between marketing communication efforts and prospective students' responses, particularly in terms of generating interest and influencing enrollment decisions. Therefore, investigating the effectiveness of marketing communication in this context is both necessary and urgent.

From a theoretical perspective, previous studies on higher education marketing communication have produced inconsistent findings. Some studies emphasize the dominant role of advertising in influencing student choices (Yus Tiana, Arumsari, & Faidah, 2023), while others report limited effects of sales promotion (Rehman, Gulzar, & Aslam, 2022). In addition, social media has been shown to enhance interaction without necessarily leading to actual enrollment decisions (Sumirat, 2022). These inconsistencies indicate a research gap, particularly regarding how different marketing communication elements operate simultaneously and how their effects are mediated by psychological factors such as interest. Moreover, limited research has specifically examined these relationships within the RPL context, which differs significantly from traditional higher education pathways.

To address this gap, this research utilizes the Theory of Planned Behavior as its conceptual basis. This theory explains that an individual's actions are driven by personal evaluations, social pressures, and the extent to which they feel capable of performing the behavior, all of which contribute to the formation of intention before it is realized in actual behavior. In this study, interest is interpreted as a form of intention that serves as a link between marketing communication and students' decisions to pursue enrollment. Through this approach, the study offers a deeper exploration of the cognitive and psychological processes that shape decision-making in the higher education setting.

This study focuses on four key elements of marketing communication: personal selling, sales promotion, social media marketing, and advertising. These elements represent commonly used strategies in higher education marketing (Akbari et al., 2022). Personal selling facilitates direct interaction and information exchange, sales promotion provides short-term incentives, social media marketing enhances engagement and reach, and advertising contributes to awareness and institutional image building.

Accordingly, this research is designed to analyze how the four dimensions of market-oriented communication affect students' choices to participate in the RPL program, while positioning interest as an intervening variable that explains the relationship. By doing so, this research not only evaluates the direct effects of marketing communication strategies but also explains the underlying mechanism through which these strategies influence decision-making.

This study offers several key contributions that distinguish it from prior research. To begin with, it highlights the RPL program as an alternative higher education pathway that has received limited scholarly attention. In addition, the study integrates various dimensions of

Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi dan Bisnis
Vol. 23. No.1, Maret 2026: 22-36
EISSN : 2442 – 9813
ISSN : 1829 – 9822

promotional or communication strategies into a unified analytical model. Furthermore, it conceptualizes interest as an intervening factor within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, allowing for a more nuanced explanation of how communication strategies shape students' decisions to enroll.

Overall, this research is intended to generate data-based support regarding how marketing communication contributes to the formation of interest and affects students' decisions in the context of the RPL program. This study is expected to offer insights that anticipated to enrich the advancement of communication-related theories within the higher education domain and provide practical recommendations for enhancing promotional strategies in alternative education pathways.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by (Eagle, Czarnecka, Dahl, & Lloyd, 2020) is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which explains that behavioral intention is shaped by individuals' personal evaluations and social influences. Ajzen further incorporated an individual's perception of their ability to perform a behavior as an additional factor, thereby enhancing the model's capacity to predict actual behavior.

According to to (Camilleri, 2020), attitudes toward behavior, social expectations, and an individual's sense of control collectively influence a person's willingness to engage in a particular action. A favorable perception of a program (attitude), support from the surrounding social environment (subjective norms), and the perceived level of ease or capability (behavioral control) all play a role in shaping intention, which ultimately leads to actual behavior.

The relationship among these variables is presented in Figure 1, which demonstrates how personal evaluations, social influences, and perceived control contribute to the formation of intention, which subsequently determines behavior. In addition, perceived behavioral control may also directly influence behavior, particularly when individuals perceive a high level of control over the action.

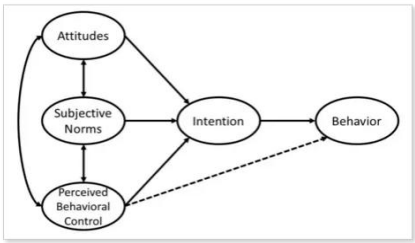

Figure 1. Planned Behavior Theory Model
Source : (Ajzen, 2005)

Based on this framework, TPB offers a robust conceptual basis to explain how decisions are formed. Within the scope of this research, interest is defined as a form of behavioral intention that acts as a mediator between marketing communication and students' enrollment decisions. Thus, marketing communication elements are expected to influence attitudes, social perceptions, and perceived control, which in turn shape interest and ultimately lead to decision-making behavior.

Marketing Communication

Marketing communication refers to the strategic process through which organizations deliver information, persuade audiences, and build relationships with

target markets in order to influence decision-making (Soedarsono, Mohamad, Adamu, & Pradita, 2020). Rather than merely transmitting messages, contemporary marketing communication emphasizes interaction, engagement, and value creation, particularly in service-based sectors such as the tertiary education sector.

In the educational sector, marketing communication functions not only to provide information but also to influence perceptions, minimize uncertainty, and assist prospective students in navigating complex decision-making processes (Purwanto, 2011).

Integrated Marketing Communication

The concept of IMC can be understood as the strategic alignment of multiple promotional channels to ensure a unified and impactful communication approach. As stated by (Khanom, 2023), IMC aims to optimize communication effectiveness by integrating multiple strategies into a unified framework. This integrated approach is particularly important in higher education, where prospective students rely on multiple information sources before making decisions.

IMC provides the theoretical foundation for selecting multiple communication elements in this study, as it assumes that different promotional tools work synergistically rather than independently in influencing consumer behavior.

Personal Selling

According to (Rosyidah, Matin, & Rosyidi, 2020), personal selling involves direct interaction between marketers and prospective consumers through salesmanship, negotiation, and relationship marketing. In higher education, personal selling is particularly relevant because it allows institutions to provide personalized information, address prospective students' concerns, and build trust, which are critical factors in high-involvement decisions such as program selection.

Within the TPB framework, personal selling is anticipated to shape individuals' evaluations and their sense of control by improving understanding and minimizing uncertainty, thereby increasing students' interest.

Sales promotion

Sales represents strategic efforts involving limited-time incentives that are intended to accelerate responses from the target audience. In the context of higher education, sales promotion may include tuition discounts, scholarships, or flexible payment schemes that enhance the perceived value of a program.

The use of incentive frequency, incentive value, and accessibility requirements as indicators in this study reflects key dimensions of promotional effectiveness. These indicators are theoretically linked to perceived behavioral control in TPB, as they influence how easy or beneficial it is for prospective students to enroll in a program.

However, prior research suggests that the effectiveness of sales promotion in educational decisions may vary depending on the level of involvement and long-term considerations associated with the decision.

.

Social Media Marketing

The indicators used to measure social media marketing in this study are adopted from (Mahoney & Tang, 2024), which include entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and information sharing. Social media marketing plays a

critical role in higher education by facilitating two-way communication, enhancing engagement, and providing real-time information to prospective students.

From a TPB perspective, social media marketing is anticipated to shape individuals' evaluations and social influences by influencing perceptions as well as facilitating peer interaction, which can strengthen students' interest in a program.

Advertising

Advertising can be described as an impersonal communication approach intended to convey persuasive messages to a wide audience. According to (Mahoney & Tang, 2024), key elements of advertising include informativeness, credibility, entertainment, and irritation.

In higher education, advertising primarily functions to build awareness and initial perceptions of a program. However, its influence on final decision-making may be limited compared to more interactive communication forms.

Within TPB, advertising is expected to influence attitudes but may have a weaker effect on behavioral intention compared to more personalized communication strategies.

Interest (Behavioral Intention)

Interest is conceptualized as a psychological state that indicates an individual's readiness to become involved with a specific option. According to (Schiffman, 2012), interest can be measured through information seeking, consideration, desire, and trial intention.

In this study, interest represents behavioral intention within the TPB framework and and functions as an essential intermediary linking marketing communication with decision-making. A higher level of interest indicates a stronger likelihood of progressing toward actual enrollmentt.

Selection Decision

Student decision-making is conceptualized based on the stages of consumer decision processes (Blakeman, 2023), involving a sequence of activities that begin with the awareness of a need, followed by information exploration, comparison of options, final decision-making, and subsequent evaluation.

These stages reflect a structured process through which prospective students evaluate higher education options, including RPL programs. Marketing communication plays a critical role at each stage by providing relevant information, shaping perceptions, and reinforcing decisions.

In this study, the decision to enroll in the RPL program is treated as the final behavioral outcome influenced by both marketing communication and interest as an intervening variable.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Program

The RPL program is conceptualized as the formal acknowledgment of an individual's prior learning experiences, including formal, non-formal, and work-based learning, as a basis for continuing higher education.

Within this research, the RPL program is positioned as a non-traditional higher education pathway characterized by flexibility, relevance to professional experience, and alternative entry mechanisms. This distinctive nature differentiates RPL from conventional programs and necessitates more targeted and

effective marketing communication strategies.

Therefore, the inclusion of the RPL context in this study is essential, as it provides a unique setting to examine how marketing communication influences decision-making in non-traditional education systems, which remain underexplored in existing literature.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to examine the relationships between marketing communication variables, interest, and enrollment decisions. Data for this research were obtained using a structured survey instrument administered to selected respondents. The analysis process was carried out to evaluate the proposed hypotheses through appropriate statistical techniques.

Population and Sample

The population examined in this study included undergraduate entrants through the Recognition of RPL pathway during the 2023/2024 to 2024/2025 academic years, with a total population of 1,071 individuals.

A proportionate stratified random sampling method was applied to ensure representation across faculties. The number of participants was calculated using the Slovin formula as presented

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

below :

With (n) indicating the total sample, (N) referring to the overall population of 1,071 individuals, then (e) denoting the accepted level of error at 5%. Based on this calculation, a total sample of 291 respondents was obtained.

Data Collection and Measurement

Data for this study were gathered through a survey instrument, employing a five-level Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument was developed to assess variables of personal selling, sales promotion, social media marketing, advertising, interest, and enrollment decision.

Data Analysis Technique

The dataset was examined using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique with the assistance of SmartPLS software This method was selected due to its ability to analyze complex relationships between latent variables, including both direct and indirect effects, as well as mediating variables such as interest.

The analysis consisted of two core phases: the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The outer model was assessed by examining the adequacy of the constructs in terms of validity and consistency. Convergent validity was established when factor loadings reached values above 0.70 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.50. Discriminant validity was evaluated through comparisons across indicators, the Fornell-Larcker approach, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Reliability was confirmed when Composite Reliability surpassed 0.70 and Cronbach's Alpha was higher than 0.60.

The structural model was then analyzed by considering the coefficient of determination (R^2) to determine how well the model explains the variance of the dependent variables, where values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 indicate strong, moderate, and weak explanatory levels, respectively. Predictive relevance was assessed using Q^2,

Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi dan Bisnis
Vol. 23. No.1, Maret 2026: 22-36
EISSN : 2442 – 9813
ISSN : 1829 – 9822

where values above zero indicate acceptable predictive performance. Hypothesis testing was carried out using t-values and probability levels, applying a significance threshold of 5% (α = 0.05). A hypothesis is regarded as supported when the t-value is greater than 1.96 or when the probability value falls below 0.05 (Ghozali, 2021).

Overall, the PLS-SEM approach enables a comprehensive evaluation of measurement validity, model strength, and the structural relationships among variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Outer Model Review

Analysis *of the outer model* with SmartPLS 3.0 indicated that every indicator used to measure the constructs met the required thresholds, with loading values exceeding 0.70, AVE values surpassing 0.50, and reliability measures (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability) also above the acceptable criteria. The discriminant validity test through cross-loading, Fornell-Larcker, and HTMT also met the criteria. The R^2 value of 0.518 for Interest and 0.631 for the Choosing Decision confirms that this research model is valid, reliable, and feasible to use for further *analysis of the inner model*. Figure 2. Results of Outer Model Analysis

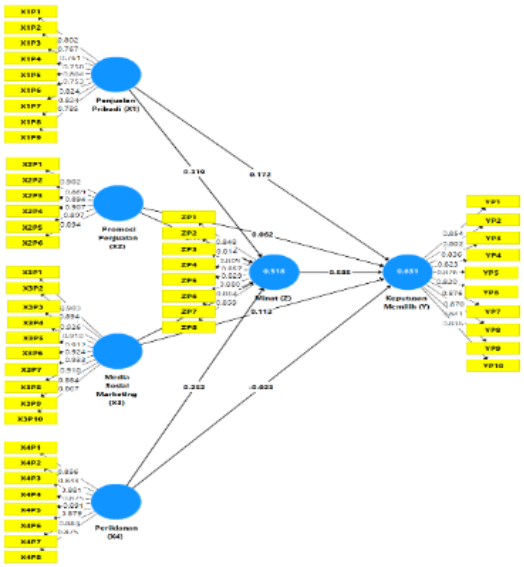

Figure 2. Outer Model Analysis
Source: SMART PLS Output 3, 2025

Inner Model *Analysis*

Structural model evaluation (inner model) represents a phase aimed at examining how latent variables are interconnected within the study, including the assessment of the magnitude, direction, and statistical significance of relationships among constructs using R^2, Q^2, and path coefficient values (Ghozali, 2021). Figure 3 Illustration of the structural model.

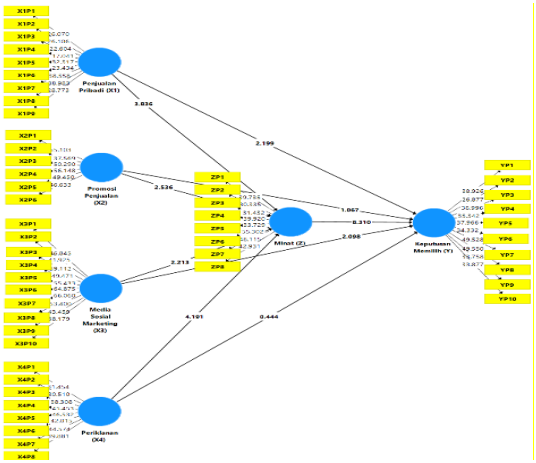

Figure 3. Analysis *of the Inner Model*
Source: Output SMART PLS 3, 2025

Vol. 23. No.1, Maret 2026: 22-36
EISSN : 2442 – 9813
ISSN : 1829 – 9822

Based on the findings obtained from the structural model (inner model) analysis presented in Figure 3, it can be explained that the exogenous variables, namely Personal Sales (X1), Sales Promotion (X2), Social Media Marketing (X3), and Advertising (X4) have different relationship paths to the mediating variable of Interest (Z) and the endogenous variable of Choosing Decision (Y). The path coefficient value shows that Personal Sales (X1) exerts a positive influence on Interest (Z) with a coefficient of 3.836, while Sales Promotion (X2) similarly shows a positive relationship with Interest (Z) with a value of 2.536. Social Media Marketing (X3) also demonstrates a positive effect, reflected by a coefficient of 2.213, while Advertising (X4) has the greatest influence on Interest (Z) with a coefficient value of 4.191.

Furthermore, Interest (Z) was proven to have a fairly strong influence on the Choosing Decision with a path coefficient reaching 8.310, when compared with the direct effects of other variables. The direct influence from Personal Selling (X1) on Voting Decisions (Y) was shown with a value of 2.199, Social Media Marketing (X3) of 0.444, and Advertising (X4) of 2.098. This indicates that the Interest variable (Z) plays an important role by acting as an intermediary that links marketing strategies (X1, X2, X3, X4) with Choosing Decision (Y). It can therefore be inferred that the more effective the implementation of personal selling, promotional activities, social media marketing, and advertising strategies, the higher the level of interest among potential consumers, which ultimately encourages the decision to choose.

The inner analysis of the model can then be observed through several key measures, namely R-Square (R^2) and Q-Square (Q^2). The R^2 value serves to indicate the extent to which exogenous variables account for variations in the endogenous variable, where higher R^2 values reflect stronger predictive capability of the model. The RSquare value of 0.67 is defined as good, 0.33 is defined as moderate or medium, and 0.19 is defined as weak. Meanwhile, the Q^2 value reflects the model's predictive relevance, which is obtained through the blindfolding procedure; when $Q^2 > 0$, this suggests that the model demonstrates sufficient predictive performance (Ghozali, 2021).

These two indicators are essential for evaluating the robustness of the overall structural model and reinforce the conclusion that interest functions as a key mediating factor linking marketing strategies to voting decisions. The R-Square (R^2) and Q-Square (Q^2) results in this model are presented as follows:

Table 1. R-Square Value (R^2)

	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Voting Decision (Y)	0,631	0,624
Interest (Z)	0,518	0,511

Source: SMART PLS Output 3, 2025

Table 2. Q-Square Value (Q^2)

	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Voting Decision (Y)	0,436
Interest (Z)	0,363

Source: SMART PLS Output 3, 2025

Based on the findings presented in Table 1, the R-Square (R^2) for the Voting Decision variable (Y) reaches 0.631, while the Adjusted R^2 is recorded at 0.624, which means that Interest (Z), Personal Sales (X1), Sales Promotion (X2), Social Media Marketing (X3), and Advertising (X4) are able to explain the variability of the Voting Decision of 63.1%, while the remaining

Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi dan Bisnis
Vol. 23. No.1, Maret 2026: 22-36
EISSN : 2442 – 9813
ISSN : 1829 – 9822

36.9% is attributed to variables not included in the model. This result falls within the strong category. Meanwhile, the R^2 for the Interest variable (Z) reached 0.518 with an Adjusted R^2 of 0.511, indicating that the independent variables accounted for 51.8% of the variation in Interest, while the remaining 48.2% was influenced by factors beyond the model. This value belongs to the moderate (medium) category.

Furthermore, the results of the Q-Square (Q^2) test in Table 5.16 show that the Interest construct (Z) achieved a Q^2 score of 0.363 (medium to large category), while the Choosing Decision (Y) reached 0.436 (large category). These results suggest that the proposed model demonstrates strong predictive relevance, indicating that the exogenous variables are capable of effectively predicting both Interest and Choosing Decisions.

Thus, these results strengthen the conclusion that the constructed structural model has strong *explanatory power* and *predictive relevance*, and affirms the important role of the Interest variable (Z) as a mediator in influencing the Choice Decision (Y).

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted to examine how far exogenous variables influence endogenous variables, either directly or through mediating variables. The evaluation is performed by analyzing the path coefficient and its significance level, allowing conclusions to be drawn regarding whether the proposed hypotheses are supported or not.

According to (Ghozali, 2021), direct influence shows the relationship between independent variables versus dependent variables without intermediaries, while indirect influence explains the role of mediating variables in bridging the relationship.

Direct Influence Path Coefficient Testing

The direct effects can be observed through the path coefficient values and the corresponding significance threshold at $\alpha = 0.05$. The outcomes of the direct effect analysis are fully displayed in the table below:

Table 3. Path Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Average (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
(X1) -> (Y)	0	0	0,078	2,199	0,028
(X2) -> (Y)	0	0	0,058	1,067	0,286
(X3) -> (Y)	0	0	0,053	2,098	0,036
(X4) -> (Y)	0	0	0,052	0,444	0,657
(Z) -> (Y)	1	0,579	0,07	8,31	0

Source: SMART PLS Output 3, 2025

Based on Table 3, the direct effect test can be described as follows:

a. **Personal Selling (X1) → Voting Decision (Y)**
   The value of the coefficient is **0.172,** Statistical T = **2.199,** and P **= 0.028**. This indicates that Personal Sales exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on the Choosing Decision.
b. **Sales Promotion (X2) → Choosing Decision (Y)**

The value of the coefficient is **0.062,** Statistical T = **1.067**, and P = **0.286**. This result is not significant, meaning that the Sales Promotion has no direct effect on the Choosing Decision.

c. **Social Media Marketing (X3) → Choosing Decision (Y)**
The value of the coefficient is **0.112,** Statistical T = **2.098**, and P = **0.036**. These outcomes indicate that Voting Decisions are significantly and positively affected by Social Media Marketing.

d. **Advertising (X4) → Voting Decision (Y)**
The value of the coefficient is **-0.023,** Statistical T = **0.444,** and P = **0.657.** These results are not significant, so Advertising has no direct effect on the Voting Decision. on the findings obtained from the analysis, the influence of advertising on the Voting Decision does not show a significant effect.

e. **Interest (Z) → Choosing Decision (Y)**
The value of the coefficient is **0.585,** T Statistics = **8.310,** and P = **0.000**. It is evident from the findings that Interest serves as a key determinant, exerting a strong and statistically meaningful positive impact on the Choosing Decision.

Indirect Influence Testing

Indirect influence testing was performed to identify the function played by mediating factors when linking independent variables and dependent variables. This process aims to develop a more in-depth interpretation of the mechanisms of interactions among variables, especially when the influence is not entirely directly occurring. Through this test, the value of the path coefficient and its significance level are obtained, which then becomes the basis for assessing whether the indirect influence hypothesis can be accepted or rejected. Findings from the indirect effects analysis are shown completely in the table below :

Table 4. Indirect Influence Test

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Average (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
(X1) -> (Z) -> (Y)	0	0	0,058	3,213	0,001
(X2) -> (Z) -> (Y)	0	0	0,041	2,526	0,012
(X3) -> (Z) -> (Y)	0	0	0,037	2,209	0,028
(X4) -> (Z) -> (Y)	0	0	0,04	3,729	0

Source: SMART PLS Output 3, 2025

Following the findings derived from the indirect influence analysis presented in Table 4, every pathway examined through the mediating role of Interest (Z) produced positive outcomes and demonstrated statistical significance at the 5% level (P < 0.05).

a. Personal Selling (X1) → Interest (Z) → Voting Decision (Y) have a a coefficient value reaching 0.186 with a Statistical T-statistic of 3.213 along with a probability value of 0.001. This value is the biggest indirect influence among other variables, which means personal sales make a strong contribution to increasing interest and ultimately driving voting decisions.

b. Sales Promotion (X2) → Interest (Z) → Voting Decision (Y) produces a coefficient value of 0.103 with a Statistical T of 2.526 and a P Value of 0.012. Although the effect is smaller than that of personal sales and advertising, sales promotion has still been shown to

have a significant effect on choosing decisions through increased interest.

c. Social Media Marketing (X3) → Interest (Z) → Voting Decision (Y) produces a coefficient value of 0.081 accompanied by a T-statistic of 2.209 as well as a probability value of 0.028. This shows that social media marketing contributes positively indirectly toward the decision to choose through increasing the interest of prospective students.
d. Advertising (X4) → Interest (Z) → Voting Decision (Y) produces a coefficient value of 0.148 as indicated by a T-statistic of 3.729 along with a probability value of 0.000. These findings suggest that advertising contributes significantly to generating interest which then impacts the decision to choose.

Overall, the findings of this research demonstrate that interest plays a role as an effective mediating variable in bridging the effects of social media marketing, personal sales, advertising, as well as sales promotion in shaping the decision to choose. The variable with the largest indirect influence was personal sales, while the smallest influence was social media marketing. These findings confirm that marketing strategies that are able to enhance the interest among prospective students will significantly influence increasing voting decisions.

Discussion

The research highlights that students' decisions to enroll in the program are positively and significantly influenced by personal selling. Rather than emphasizing statistical magnitude, this result highlights the importance of direct and personalized communication in shaping enrollment decisions. In the context of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program, which targets individuals with prior work and learning experience, prospective applicants require clear, tailored, and credible information before making decisions. Personal selling fulfills this need by enabling interactive communication and trust-building.

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), personal selling contributes to the formation of positive attitudes and enhances perceived behavioral control by reducing uncertainty and clarifying program procedures. These factors strengthen intention (interest), which subsequently leads to actual enrollment behavior.

These findings are consistent with (Hasan & Hamid, 2020), which demonstrate that personal selling significantly influences higher education choice. This suggests that consultative approaches, including personalized guidance, storytelling, and the involvement of alumni as credible sources, are particularly effective in influencing prospective students' decisions.

In contrast, sales promotion fails to exert a meaningful direct influence on enrollment decisions. This finding indicates that short-term incentives alone are insufficient to influence high-involvement decisions such as choosing a higher education program.

This can be explained by the characteristics of RPL participants, who are typically individuals with professional experience seeking flexible, relevant, and career-oriented education pathways. For this group, decisions are primarily driven by long-term value considerations rather than immediate promotional incentives.

Within Within the TPB framework, sales promotion is more likely to influence *perceived behavioral control* by

Vol. 23. No.1, Maret 2026: 22-36
EISSN : 2442 – 9813
ISSN : 1829 – 9822

increasing *the perceived* affordability *or* accessibility *of the program*, rather than directly shaping behavioral intention. This explains why its effect is more meaningful when mediated by interest.

This finding aligns with prior studies showing mixed results. (Yuda Saputra & Azman, 2025) found that promotion can significantly influence program selection, while (Sari, Isyanto, & Sumarni, 2023) reported insignificant effects in impulsive purchasing contexts. These differences suggest that the effectiveness of sales promotion is highly context-dependent, particularly in decisions involving long-term commitment such as education.

Social media marketing was found to positively influence enrollment decisions, indicating its role in shaping perceptions and engagement among prospective students. In the RPL context, social media serves as an accessible platform for disseminating information, sharing testimonials, and demonstrating program relevance to professional development.

From a theoretical perspective, social media marketing influences both attitudes and subjective norms by providing information and facilitating peer interaction. This aligns with the TPB assumption that both social factors and individual perceptions contribute to the formation of behavioral intention.

These findings are consistent with (Hajatina, 2024) and (Osin Jentia Rosni Manullang & Mariana Simanjuntak, 2024), which highlight the importance of social media in influencing student decisions. Meanwhile, (Julianto, Saptiyono, & Fitrianti, 2025) suggest that its impact may be limited when not integrated with other strategies. This indicates that social media marketing is most effective when combined with more personalized forms of communication.

Advertising, in contrast, shows no statistically meaningful direct influence on enrollment decisions. This suggests that while advertising is effective in building awareness, it is less influential in driving final decisions, particularly in the context of RPL programs.

This can be attributed to the characteristics of RPL applicants, who tend to prioritize rational and practical considerations such as program flexibility, cost efficiency, and relevance to career advancement. As a result, general advertising messages may not sufficiently address their specific informational needs.

This finding is supported by (Ben Messaoud, 2022) and (Singh & Diamond, 2020), which indicate that advertising alone is not a dominant factor in higher education decision-making. Thus, advertising should be positioned as an initial communication tool that supports awareness rather than as a primary driver of enrollment decisions.

Furthermore, the results confirm that interest is the strongest determinant of enrollment decisions, emphasizing its central role as a mediating variable. This finding reinforces the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, emphasizing that intention serves as the closest determinant of actual behavior

The main results of the research are consistent with (Yogaswara, Debianto, Buono, & Avianti, 2023), which highlight the significant role of interest in influencing educational choices. In this study, interest functions as the key mechanism through which marketing communication strategies translate into actual enrollment decisions.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that marketing communication strategies do not operate independently but influence decision-making primarily through the formation of interest. In the context of RPL programs, which cater to non-traditional

learners, strategies that emphasize personalized communication, relevant information, and practical value are more effective in shaping enrollment decisions.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that marketing communication significantly influences enrollment decisions in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program, both directly and indirectly through interest. Personal selling and social media marketing demonstrated statistically significant direct influences on enrollment decisions, indicating that interactive and personalized communication channels are more effective in influencing prospective students. In contrast, sales promotion and advertising do not directly affect decisions, suggesting that these strategies primarily function as supporting tools rather than decisive factors.

Importantly, interest emerges as the strongest determinant of enrollment decisions, confirming its role as a key mediating variable. This finding highlights that marketing communication strategies are most effective when they successfully generate and strengthen prospective students' interest, which subsequently leads to actual decision-making. Thus, the effectiveness of marketing communication lies not only in message delivery but in its ability to shape intention.

Suggestion

Based on the results obtained, a number of strategic recommendations can be formulated. To begin with, higher education institutions are encouraged to emphasize personal selling approaches by implementing structured consultation sessions, personalized academic advising, and alumni engagement programs. These approaches are essential because they enhance trust, reduce uncertainty, and directly influence prospective students' evaluation of the program.

Second, social media marketing should be optimized by developing content that is informative, interactive, and relevant to the needs of RPL participants, such as showcasing career advancement opportunities, testimonials, and flexible learning pathways. This is important because because social media serves as a major driver in forming perceptions and strengthening social influence.

Third, sales promotion strategies should be designed to support accessibility rather than merely offering incentives. For example, flexible payment schemes and clearly communicated financial benefits can enhance perceived behavioral control, which indirectly strengthens interest.

Fourth, advertising should focus on building awareness and credibility by emphasizing institutional reputation, program relevance, and professional outcomes. As its role is primarily at the initial stage of the decision process, advertising should be integrated with more interactive communication strategies.

For future studies, it is advisable to incorporate additional factors including perceived cost, institutional image, service quality, and social influence, as these factors may further explain students' decision-making processes in non-traditional education pathways like RPL. These variables are important because they represent both economic and psychological considerations that may interact with marketing communication and interest.

REFERENCES

Ajzen, I. (2005). *Attitudes, Personality and Behaviour*. McGraw-Hill Education. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.id/books?id=dmJ9EGEy0ZYC

Akbari, D. A., Jastacia, B., Setiawan, E., & Widya Ningsih, D. (2022). The Marketing Power of TikTok: A Content Analysis in Higher Education. *Binus Business Review*, *13*(2), 159–170. https://doi.org/10.21512/bbr.v13i2.8014

Ben Messaoud, H. E. (2022). Social Media Marketing Mediated Changes In Consumer Behavior From E-Commerce To Social Commerce. *International Journal of Economics and Management Studies*, *9*(7), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.14445/23939125/ijems-v9i7p101

Blakeman, R. (2023). *Integrated Marketing Communication: Creative Strategy from Idea to Implementation*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.id/books?id=tPDIEAAAQBAJ

Camilleri, M. (2020). Higher education marketing communications in the digital era. *Strategic Marketing of Higher Education in Africa*, 79–95. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429320934-7

Dave Evans, S. B. J. M. K. (2021). *Social Media Marketing*. A G Printing & Publishing. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.id/books?id=7lgkEAAAQBAJ

Eagle, L., Czarnecka, B., Dahl, S., & Lloyd, J. (2020). *Marketing Communications With*.

Ghozali, I. (2021). *Partial least squares: konsep, teknik, dan aplikasi menggunakan program SmartPLS 3.2. 9 untuk penelitian empiris*.

Hajatina. (2024). Analisis Strategi Promosi Media Sosial Terhadap Keputusan Mahasiswa dalam Memilih Institusi Pendidikan Tinggi. *El-Mal: Jurnal Kajian Ekonomi & Bisnis Islam*, *5*(7), 136–146. https://doi.org/10.47467/elmal.v5i7.4304

Hasan, A., & Hamid, N. A. (2020). Strategi Promosi Dalam Meningkatkan Jumlah Mahasiswa Pasca Perubahan Menjadi Universitas Pada Universitas Muslim Maros. *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen EMOR*, *53*(9), 1689–1699.

Julianto, E. N., Saptiyono, A., & Fitrianti, A. (2025). *Pengaruh Konten Sosial Media Terhadap Keputusan Pemilihan Studi Mahasiswa Baru Di Universitas Semarang* (Vol. 17).

Khanom, M. T. (2023). Using social media marketing in the digital era: A necessity or a choice. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147- 4478)*, *12*(3), 88–98. https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v12i3.2507

Mahoney, L. M., & Tang, T. (2024). *Strategic Social Media: From Marketing to Social Change*. Wiley. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.id/books?id=MEf2EAAAQBAJ

Osin Jentia Rosni Manullang, & Mariana Simanjuntak. (2024). Pengaruh Pemasaran Media Sosial Dan Persepsi Calon Mahasiswa Terhadap Keputusan Pemilihan Perguruan Tinggi. *Jurnal Manajemen Kreatif Dan Inovasi*, *2*(3), 168–179. https://doi.org/10.59581/jmki-widyakarya.v2i3.3820

Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, K. R. D. T. R. I. (2021). Nomor 41 Tahun 2021

Tentang Rekognisi Pembelajaran Lampau. *Peraturan Mendikbudristek RI*, *41*.

Rehman, S. ul, Gulzar, R., & Aslam, W. (2022). Developing the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) through Social Media (SM): The Modern Marketing Communication Approach. *SAGE Open*, *12*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221099936

Rosyidah, N., Matin, & Rosyidi, U. (2020). Internationalization in higher education: University's effective promotion strategies in building international trust. *European Journal of Educational Research*, *9*(1), 351–361. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.9.1.351

Sari, C. S., Isyanto, P., & Sumarni, N. (2023). Pengaruh Promosi Penjualan Dan Motivasi Belanja Hedonis Terhadap PembelianImpulsif Marketplace Shopee (Studi Pada Mahasiswa Program Studi ManajemenAngkatan 2019 Fakultas Ekonomi Dan Bisnis Universitas Buana Perjuangan Karawang). *Management Studies and Entrepreneurship Journal*, *4*(5), 7357–7369. Retrieved from http://journal.yrpipku.com/index.php/msej

Singh, S., & Diamond, S. (2020). *Social Media Marketing For Dummies*. Wiley. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.id/books?id=yHDJDwAAQBAJ

Soedarsono, D. K., Mohamad, B., Adamu, A. A., & Pradita, K. A. (2020). Managing digital marketing communication of coffee shop using instagram. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies*, *14*(5), 108–118. https://doi.org/10.3991/IJIM.V14I05.13351

Sugiyono. (2020). *Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R & D*.

Sumirat, P. (2022). Pengaruh Advertising, Personal Selling dan Sales Promotion terhadap Keputusan Mahasiswa untuk Kuliah di STIKOM Prosia. *Jurnal Mahardika Adiwidia*, (2022), 111–118. Retrieved from https://scholar.archive.org/work/v7rywulsnvfb7nqfrfowldzoju/access/wayback/http://jurnal.usahid.ac.id/index.php/mahardikaadiwidia/article/download/34/652

Yogaswara, M. R., Debianto, R., Buono, S. A., & Avianti, F. P. (2023). Pengaruh Faktor Minat Dan Word Of Mouth Terhadap Keputusan Mahasiswa Memilih Prodi Manajemen Di Universitas Mayjen Sungkono Mojokerto. *Andrew's Disease of the Skin Clinical Dermatology.*, *4*(1), 1–23.

Yuda Saputra, & Azman, H. A. (2025). *Pengaruh Promosi dan WOM Terhadap Keputusan Mahasiswa Melanjutkan Pendidikan di Universitas Swasta Kota Padang yang Dimediasi Kepercayaan*. *27*(2), 86.

Yus Tiana, M., Arumsari, N. R., & Faidah, F. (2023). Pengaruh Advertising, Personal Selling, Sales Promotion, Dan Publicity Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian (Studi Kasus Pada Pelanggan Umkm Mebel Di Desa Mulyoharjo). *Jurnal Ecoment Global*, *8*(2), 67–78. https://doi.org/10.36982/jeg.v8i2.3417