
Original Research Article

BRAND RESONANCE AND STUDENTS' ENROLLMENT DECISION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract: The increasing competition in the higher education sector has compelled universities to adopt branding strategies that foster strong and lasting relationships with prospective and current students. Among the dimensions of customer-based brand equity, brand resonance has emerged as a critical indicator of the strength of the relationship between an institution and its stakeholders. This study examined the influence of brand resonance on students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. The study was anchored on Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, the Resource-Based View (RBV). A causal research design guided by a positivist research philosophy was adopted. The target population was 3,171 respondents drawn from management staff and students across 35 public universities in Kenya, from which a sample of 355 was selected. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered through a blended approach of online and physical distribution, Interview schedules for the key informants(DVC, Corporate affairs and Director Linkages and resource Mobilization) was also conducted on what they do about branding. Validity was ensured through expert review, construct testing, and comparison with established measures, while Cronbach's alpha coefficient was above 0.7 hence reliable. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including multiple regression analysis, with the aid of SPSS version 27. The findings revealed that brand resonance has a significant positive influence on students' enrollment decisions ($\beta = 0.189$, $p = 0.001$). The results indicate that students are more likely to enroll in universities with which they identify emotionally, demonstrate loyalty, feel a sense of belonging, and are willing to recommend to others.

Keywords: Brand Resonance, Students' Enrollment Decision, Organizational Resources, Higher Education Marketing, Customer-Based Brand Equity, Public Universities in Kenya.

Within the higher education context, Moywaywa et al. (2024) found that brand resonance was strongly associated with positive student behaviors, with a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that emotional and psychological attachment to an institution enhances favorable student outcomes. Similarly, Mutua and Mwikya (2022) reported that brand resonance significantly influenced mobile money adoption decisions in Kenya ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$), reinforcing the importance of sustained brand engagement and visibility.

The Higher Education Brand Engagement Index (Nikolaeva and Veloutsou, 2023) quantifies brand resonance by measuring three key dimensions: advocacy behavior (tracked through digital sharing metrics), emotional connection (assessed through psycho-physiological testing), and loyalty intensity (measured by choice modeling). Current research indicates that these resonance characteristics account for 39-43% of the variance in alumni engagement measures (Stiber & Jeong, 2023).

This integrated approach explains how current brand equity management necessitates ongoing monitoring and adjustment of all four components. Leading universities are increasingly using predictive analytic to simulate interactions between salience, imagery, reaction, and resonance (Dedeoglu and Wilson, 2023), with early adopters reporting 15-20% gains in key performance indicators across the student lifecycle. The most effective techniques combine brand positioning with established institutional capabilities while being adaptable to changing student expectations in the post-pandemic educational context (Garcia-Lopez et al., 2023).

Further a study by Almeida and Santos (2023) revealed that universities integrating multiple brand equity components achieved a 23–25% increase in application rates, indicating the practical impact of coherent brand strategies on student demand. Similarly, Garcia-Lopez et al. (2023) reported statistically significant positive effects of brand-related constructs, including institutional reputation and perceived quality, on students' choice decisions (β ranging between 0.38 and 0.47, $p < 0.05$). However, both studies were conducted outside the Kenyan context and did not test a moderation model involving organizational resources. Consequently, despite strong international statistical evidence supporting the influence of brand equity on student choice, there remains a contextual and methodological gap regarding how brand equity strategies (brand salience, imagery, response, and resonance) interact with organizational resources to influence students' choice of public universities in Kenya, which the proposed study seeks to address.

Regionally, Yiadom et al. (2025) explored the influence of brand salience on students' choice of higher education institutions in a Ghanaian Technical University, revealing that institutional brand salience significantly shapes enrollment decisions and urging universities to develop distinct brand identities to remain competitive. Similarly, Moipone Matli et al. (2021) found that brand image and service quality were key factors influencing students' preferences and recommendations for Universities of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Alemu (2022) extended this perspective by examining brand equity at the Bank of Abyssinia in Ethiopia, finding that all six brand equity dimensions

influenced service choice, with brand resonance, feeling, and performance having the strongest effects, though judgment and imagery were statistically insignificant. Collectively, these studies underscore the strategic importance of branding in influencing consumer and student decisions across different service sectors.

FakhrEldin (2023) investigated the impact of brand equity on students' selection of private universities in Egypt. It aims to identify the core and supporting attributes that significantly affect students' purchase intentions, to determine how brand equity dimensions such as brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty influence students' selection of private universities in Egypt. Findings revealed that perceived quality (academic excellence, faculty credentials, and program relevance) emerged as the most significant factor shaping student decisions, followed closely by brand associations (institutional reputation, alumni success, and campus culture). Brand loyalty (student satisfaction and willingness to recommend) also played a critical role, particularly in retaining students and fostering positive word-of-mouth. While brand awareness (recognition and recall) was important for initial consideration, its impact was less decisive compared to experiential factors like quality and emotional connections. The study highlighted that private universities in Egypt can enhance competitiveness by strategically strengthening academic offerings, alumni engagement, and student experience, which collectively build enduring brand equity. These insights underscore the need for targeted marketing strategies that move beyond visibility to emphasize tangible value propositions and institutional differentiation in a crowded higher education market.

Within the higher education context, Moywaywa et al. (2024) found that brand resonance was strongly associated with positive student behaviors, with a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that emotional and psychological attachment to an institution enhances favorable student outcomes. Similarly, Mutua and Mwikya (2022) reported that brand resonance significantly influenced mobile money adoption decisions in Kenya ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$), reinforcing the importance of sustained brand engagement and visibility.

Although these studies provide clear statistical evidence on the influence of brand salience and brand resonance, they largely focus on consumer behavior or institutional performance outcomes rather than students' choice of public universities. Moreover, they do not consider how organizational resources may shape or strengthen these relationships, thereby revealing a contextual and conceptual gap that the proposed study aims to address within the Kenyan public university sector.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To establish the relationship between brand resonance and students' enrollment decision in Public Universities in Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section covers the empirical literature review, theoretical framework, knowledge gap and lastly the conceptual framework.

2.2 Review of Related Literature

The literature review for this study was structured around the key research objectives, examining existing scholarly works, theories, and empirical findings that are related to the study.

2.2.2 Brand Resonance and Students' Choice of Public Universities

Brand resonance refers to the deep psychological connection and loyalty that consumers develop with a brand, characterized by strong emotional attachment and engagement (Husain et al. 2022).

In United States, Garcia (2016) examines how attitudinal brand resonance (comprising cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions) influences college selection decisions through academic and athletic factors. Based on multiple regression analysis, results show that attitudinal brand resonance does have a significant effect on college decision based on both academic and athletic factors. However, the research has several limitations: it focuses narrowly on brand resonance without considering other decision factors like cost or location, and relies solely on self-reported survey data which may not capture actual enrollment behaviors. The study also fails to differentiate between different types of institutions (liberal arts vs. research universities), potentially masking varied effects across higher education sectors. Additionally, the absence of longitudinal data limits understanding of how brand resonance influences decisions over time. These gaps suggest need for more comprehensive models incorporating additional decision factors and institutional variations and endeavor the current study is seeking to achieve through public universities in Kenya.

Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024) investigated how a university's brand serves as a competitive advantage in higher education and student brand resonance in Iranian private universities. Using a quantitative approach with structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze data from students at major Tehran-based private institutions, the research confirmed all hypothesized relationships. Key findings revealed that core services significantly enhance university resonance, with emotional environment, faculty perceptions, and course suitability collectively strengthening the institution's brand. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that this enhanced resonance directly increases student enrolment. The analysis also uncovered important indirect relationships among these dimensions, showing that core services not only build loyalty but subsequently foster reputational capital. These results highlight the critical pathway from service quality to reputation development and ultimately to student resonance, providing private universities with empirical evidence to strategically prioritize these interconnected factors for competitive positioning in Iran's higher education market. However, limitations includes

geographic concentration on Tehran, potentially overlooking regional variations, and a focus solely on private institutions, limiting applicability to public universities as being sought by the current study. Additionally, its quantitative approach misses nuanced student perspectives that qualitative methods could reveal. These gaps suggest need for broader geographic sampling, inclusion of public universities, and mixed-methods approaches to better understand brand like the current research proposing to attain.

Moywaywa et al. (2024) investigated the impact of brand resonance on customer citizenship behavior among fourth-year students in Mount Kenya region universities, applying Keller's brand theory. Using a descriptive survey design, 254 respondents were sampled from 3,000 students via Israel's (2009) formula. Structured questionnaires with closed and open-ended questions were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Results showed a strong positive link between brand resonance and customer citizenship behavior, prompting recommendations for universities to improve brand resonance through quality education. However, gaps include methodological limitations such as (solely quantitative), geographic restriction (only Mount Kenya), population bias (excluding other stakeholders), practical lack of actionable frameworks and contextual omission of institutional variations in terms of size and ownership. These gaps highlight opportunities for broader, mixed-methods research across diverse settings and populations an endeavor the study at hand is seeking to explore.

Mutua and Mwikya (2022) examined how brand resonance and brand name awareness influence consumer decision-making in Airtel Kenya's mobile money services, grounded in Consistency Theory and Unified Theory. Using a descriptive design, the study surveyed 123 randomly selected Airtel Money customers in Nairobi's CBD from a population of 36,800. Data was collected via questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS, employing correlation and regression analysis. Findings revealed strong positive relationships between both brand resonance and consumer decision-making. The study recommends that Airtel enhance brand loyalty and awareness through public welfare sponsorship, increased corporate social responsibility, and aggressive advertising on commercial and social media platforms. However, limitations include geographic restriction (Nairobi only), potential sampling bias (CBD-focused), and lack of qualitative insights into consumer perceptions. Unlike the previous study, the current study focused in all public universities in Kenya.

2.2.6 Students' Choice of Public Universities in Kenya

Afrin (2020) investigated how private university branding in Pakistan influences students' selection choices, revealing that effective branding fosters trust, recognition, and popularity among target audiences, thereby giving universities a competitive edge in attracting students. The study, based on survey results, confirms that branding value significantly impacts the complex decision-making processes of prospective students, emphasizing the need for strategic marketing to strengthen institutional positioning. Nonetheless, several gaps are apparent that warrant this study; methodologically, the study lacks detail on its sampling and analysis techniques, limiting the robustness of its findings

contrary to the current study and geographically, its focus on Pakistan constrains generalization to different cultural and educational contexts like Kenya's public universities. In terms of population, the research does not consider the perspectives of other key stakeholders such as university management; practically, while identifying the importance of branding, it offers limited guidance on specific strategies universities should adopt; contextually, it does not account for external environmental factors like regulatory policies or economic constraints that might moderate students' choices and branding relationship.

Al Samman and Al-Ethawi (2023), investigate marketing and branding strategies and techniques used by higher education institutions across different regions of the world. The study is based on a systematic review of existing literature and case studies from diverse global regions. The study highlights the critical role of branding and marketing in higher education (HE), emphasizing that strong branding helps institutions differentiate themselves, attract students and funding, and shape public perception. Effective strategies include digital marketing, showcasing unique strengths (research excellence, employability outcomes), and leveraging international collaborations and rankings. Findings indicate that well-executed branding positively impacts enrollment, funding, and institutional reputation, as evidenced by regional case studies from North America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, each demonstrating distinct approaches such as alumni network promotion, infrastructure development, and community engagement. The study recommends that HE institutions cultivate a distinctive brand identity, adopt data-driven marketing, and adapt strategies based on public perception to remain competitive.

Yamin (2024) explores the impact of branding strategies specifically digital marketing, faculty reputation, and campus infrastructure on student enrolment decisions in Bangladesh, using a secondary data methodology that involves reviewing existing literature, case studies, and market trends. The study finds that strong branding significantly enhances university reputation, increases enrolment rates, and improves student satisfaction, highlighting the importance of aligning branding strategies with student expectations for long-term institutional success. However, several gaps are evident: methodologically, the exclusive reliance on secondary data limits the depth of empirical insight and real-time stakeholder perspectives dissimilar to the current proposed study; geographically, the focus on Bangladesh restricts the applicability of findings to broader contexts such as public universities in Kenya; in terms of population, the study does not incorporate direct input from students or university administrators; practically, while emphasizing strategic alignment, it lacks specific, actionable recommendations; conceptually, it treats branding broadly without unpacking the relative impact of each branding element; and contextually, it does not fully address external factors such as government policy or socio-economic influences that might affect student decision-making and branding among students.

Nakalyakaani and Bisaso (2020) examined the relationship between school branding and student enrolment in private secondary schools in Iganga Municipality, focusing on school image, school culture, and customer care. Using a cross-sectional

survey design with both quantitative and qualitative methods, they sampled 100 student leaders, 3 head teachers, and 33 academic heads, collecting data through Likert-type questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. The findings revealed statistically significant but weak positive correlations between the branding elements and student enrolment, leading to the conclusion that school branding has a limited influence on enrolment. However, several gaps that warrant the current proposed study in Kenya remain: methodologically, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences contrary to the currently proposed seeking to utilize causal research design; geographically, the study is confined to Iganga Municipality, affecting generalization unlike the current study which is being proposed to be carried out in all public universities in Kenya; in terms of population, it omits key stakeholders like university management and prospective students; practically, it offers limited actionable insights due to the weak correlations found hence the need for current study.

Muendo et al. (2024) examined the influence of corporate branding on postgraduate students' university choices in selected Kenyan universities, focusing on internal, external, and service mix branding strategies. Through student surveys, the study assessed how branding shapes perceptions of academic excellence, institutional reputation, facilities, and overall value. Findings revealed that effective corporate branding significantly enhances perceptions of prestige, academic strength, and unique program offerings, with a strong emphasis on communicating value through state-of-the-art facilities, career prospects, and alumni success. However, several gaps emerge that warrant the proposed study: methodologically, while surveys provide valuable insights, the study may benefit from triangulation with qualitative data for deeper understanding dissimilar to the proposed study; geographically, its focus on select Kenyan universities limits generalization to all public universities unlike the current study seeking to be performed in all universities. In terms of population, it concentrates solely on postgraduate students, overlooking undergraduate who are the major stakeholders. It also ignored the university's management who are critical as far as resource allocation is concerned hence the need for the current study.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model by Kevin Lane Keller (1993), Barney's Resource-Based View (RBV) (1991) theory and Ajzen's (1985) and extended in (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

2.3.1 Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model by Kevin Lane Keller (1993)

As developed by Kevin Lane Keller (1993), Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how brand knowledge influences consumer behavior. In higher education contexts, this model effectively explains how prospective students develop preferences and make enrollment decisions based on university brand perception and associations.

Several researchers have modified and enhanced the original CBBE framework to address specific contexts and measurement challenges. Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed multidimensional brand equity scales based on Keller's dimensions, creating reliable measurement instruments, while Netemeyer et al. (2004) created comprehensive consumer-based brand equity measures with improved psychometric properties. Aaker's (1991) parallel framework complemented Keller's work by emphasizing brand assets, and Washburn and Plank (2002) adapted the model for co-branding situations. These theoretical adaptations have strengthened the model's empirical measurement capabilities and broadened its applicability significantly. From the theory, brand salience, the foundational CBBE pyramid level, determines university awareness among potential students. Public universities must establish strong brand recognition through consistent messaging, visual identity, and market presence to ensure consideration during the university selection process by prospective students and stakeholders.

Numerous studies have successfully applied Keller's CBBE model across diverse sectors beyond its original consumer goods focus. Research by Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) extended the model to online environments, demonstrating its digital applicability, while Buil et al. (2013) validated its cross-cultural effectiveness in developing markets across Europe and Latin America. Additional applications include luxury brands (Godey et al., 2012), retail banking (Yeh et al., 2016), and hospitality services (Kayaman and Arasli, 2007). These diverse applications demonstrate the model's versatility and robust theoretical foundation across industries

Recent developments include digital-age modifications and specialized service sector applications addressing contemporary branding challenges. Kumar et al. (2019) integrated social media metrics and digital engagement measures into CBBE measurement frameworks, while Mourad et al. (2011) specifically adapted the model for higher education contexts, emphasizing reputation and academic brand dimensions. Furthermore, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) incorporated user-generated content effects, and Bruhn et al. (2012) examined integrated marketing communications' impact on CBBE dimensions. These modern enhancements ensure the framework remains relevant for contemporary branding challenges, digital marketing strategies, and specialized sectors like educational institutions.

Brand performance and imagery dimensions capture functional and emotional benefits students associate with universities. Academic reputation, faculty quality, campus facilities represent performance attributes, while social status, campus culture, and alumni networks constitute imagery elements influencing enrollment decisions significantly. Brand judgments encompass student evaluations of university credibility, quality, and superiority compared to competitors. Positive judgments regarding academic excellence, career prospects, and institutional reputation directly correlate with increased application rates and enrollment intentions among prospective students.

Brand feelings represent emotional responses students experience toward universities, including warmth, excitement, security, and pride. These emotional connections significantly influence loyalty, word-of-mouth recommendations, and

ultimately enrollment decisions, making emotional branding crucial for public university marketing strategies. Brand resonance, the pyramid's apex, reflects deep psychological bonds between students and universities, manifesting as loyalty, advocacy, and community engagement. Recent studies demonstrate CBBE's continued relevance in educational contexts, with researchers applying the model to understand student choice behavior (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2021; Pinar et al., 2020).

Keller's (1993) CBBE model, while foundational, faces criticism for its linear hierarchy (Buil et al. 2013) and Western bias Monga, (2020), lacking empirical validation in digital contexts Christodoulides, (2020) and collectivist cultures where relational branding dominates (Nam et al., 2021).

2.3.2 Resource-Based View (RBV) by Barney's (1991)

Jay B. Barney initially established the Resource-Based View (RBV) paradigm in his 1991 article "Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage". However, the idea had its origins in previous work by Edith Penrose (1959) and Birger Wernerfelt (1984), who established the foundation for understanding how a firm's resources contribute to its competitive advantage.

The resource-based view (RBV) fundamentally posits that while organizations may establish clear strategic objectives, their ability to execute these goals is frequently constrained by finite resource endowments (Rangan, 2004). This theoretical perspective emphasizes the strategic application and allocation of organizational assets, which fosters the creation of resource-based capabilities that ultimately yield sustainable competitive differentiation (Prior & Glaser, 2003). Firm resources may according to the theory may originate from either internal or external environments and can be obtained through acquisition or represent existing organizational assets (Arbab Kash et al., 2014). The strategic integration and deployment of these resources ultimately determines the firm's competitive positioning in the marketplace.

The theory posits that a firm's sustained competitive advantage arises from its unique resources and capabilities that are Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-Substitutable (VRIN). This perspective emphasizes the internal strengths of an organization, suggesting that leveraging these unique assets can lead to superior performance (Barney, 1991). In the context of public universities, RBV implies that institutions can differentiate themselves and build strong brand equity by effectively utilizing their distinctive resources, such as faculty expertise, research capabilities, and institutional reputation.

Brand equity, including aspects like brand salience and brand resonance, is critical in this differentiation. Brand salience is the extent to which a brand is considered or noticed by a student when making a purchasing decision. It is influenced by things like brand awareness and the visibility of the institution's services. Brand resonance, on the other hand, shows the strength of students' psychological bonds with the university, including factors such as brand loyalty, attachment, and active involvement. These

dimensions are essential for creating a successful university brand that attracts and keeps students.

Empirical studies support the RBV framework in the higher education sector. A study conducted by Pinar, Girard, and Basfirinci (2020) at a public university in Turkey revealed significant relationships among brand equity dimensions, including brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty. These dimensions collectively influence students' university learning experiences, highlighting the importance of leveraging internal resources to enhance brand equity.

Brand resonance represents the depth of the psychological bond students have with the university, encompassing aspects like brand loyalty, attachment, and active engagement (Sastrina et al. 2024). The RBV suggests that universities should focus on developing capabilities that enhance their brand equity. This includes investing in faculty development, fostering a positive campus environment, and engaging with students and alumni to build strong brand associations. The RBV theory also underscores the importance of intangible resources in building brand equity. For public universities, intangible assets such as academic reputation, alumni networks, and institutional culture are critical. These resources are often difficult for competitors to replicate, providing a sustainable competitive advantage.

Barney's RBV theory provides a valuable framework for public universities to develop brand equity strategies focused on objective of this study; brand salience and brand resonance. Through identifying and leveraging their unique resources and capabilities, universities can create strong, differentiated brands that attract and retain students.

One significant criticism of Barney's Resource-Based View (RBV) is its low prescriptive value. According to Priem and Butler (2001), the RBV's VRIN criteria, valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, are tautological and provide no practical direction to managers. They argue that the theory's wide and extensive definitions of resources make it difficult to identify specific, actionable resources that can lead to long-term competitive advantages. This critique contends that, while the RBV provides a framework for comprehending competitive advantage, it lacks clear guidelines for practical use in dynamic and competitive situations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section covers the following topics: research design, study area, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, data collection tools, validity and reliability of tools, data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical concerns.

3.2 Research Design

A causal research design was appropriate for this study, as it allowed the researcher to determine whether changes in students' choice of public universities (the dependent variable) are directly influenced by brand resonance by providing stronger evidence of

causation rather than mere association. To demonstrate causality, the researcher measured the independent variable (IV) before the dependent variable (DV) to confirm that changes in the IV precede changes in the DV. Unlike correlational research, which only identifies relationships without establishing directionality or controlling for extraneous factors, a causal design, such as an experiment or quasi-experiment, enables the controlled examination of how specific branding and resource allocation strategies impact student enrollment decisions, thereby enhancing internal validity (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Given the study's objective of evaluating the effects of brand equity and institutional resources on student preferences, a causal approach is particularly valuable, as it isolates the influence of these variables rather than merely identifying patterns in existing data. Additionally, even with a large sample, advanced statistical techniques such as regression analysis or structural equation modeling (SEM) can be applied within a causal framework to strengthen causal inferences and account for potential confounders (Tumiran, 2023). This methodology is further justified by the need for evidence-based policy recommendations; while correlational findings may lead to ambiguous suggestions, a causal understanding is critical for university administrators and policymakers seeking to implement effective branding and resource optimization strategies (Ary et al., 2018). Thus, a causal design not only aligns with the study's objectives but also yields more rigorous and actionable insights.

The positivism research philosophy was appropriate for this study because it aligned with the objective of examining causal relationships through measurable and observable data. Positivism emphasizes objectivity, empirical evidence, and structured methodologies, which are essential for analyzing how brand equity strategies and institutional resources influence student enrollment decisions. Through adopting a quantitative approach, this study can collect numerical data through surveys or secondary datasets, allowing for statistical analysis to test hypotheses and establish generalizable patterns. Given that brand equity and organizational resources can be quantified through metrics identified including brand salience, brand imagery, brand response, and brand resonance, positivism enables a systematic investigation into their impact on student choice, ensuring findings are replicable and verifiable (Saunders et al., 2019).

Furthermore, positivism supports the use of a causal research design, which is critical for determining whether specific branding and resource strategies directly affect student preferences. Unlike interpretive philosophy that focus on subjective meanings, positivism allows for controlled, hypothesis-driven testing, enhancing the study's reliability and validity. This philosophy also facilitates the use of advanced statistical tools such as regression analysis to isolate key factors influencing student decisions while minimizing researcher bias. Since the study aims to provide actionable insights for university policymakers and marketers, a positivist approach ensures that recommendations are grounded in empirical evidence rather than subjective interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, positivism strengthens the study's rigor and applicability in shaping evidence-based branding and resource allocation strategies in Kenya's higher education sector.

3.3 Location of the Study

The study was conducted in all 35 public universities in Kenya as recognized by the Commission for University Education (CUE) (2024), since these institutions enroll the majority of government-sponsored students and face persistent challenges in converting brand equity into improved student recruitment outcomes despite controlling 68% of the higher education market. This consisted of 3171 respondents drawn from key functional units directly involved in branding and academic decision-making, Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic and Student Affairs), Directors of Research and Linkages, corporate affairs personnel (directors, public relations officers, and marketing officers), and students whose roles provide comprehensive insights into academic quality, institutional reputation, communication campaigns, and student preferences. This combination of stakeholders ensures rich, credible, and context-specific data capable of explaining how brand equity and organizational resources influence student recruitment in Kenya's public universities.

Global research demonstrates that effective branding strategies can increase applications by 23-25%, boost student satisfaction by 18-21%, and enhance alumni engagement by 39-43%. This is because Kenya's public universities face unique challenges in translating brand equity into student recruitment success despite controlling 68% of the higher education market, these institutions are experiencing declining enrollments amid rapid sector expansion and intense competition from private universities. This makes the location appropriate because public universities operate within a competitive and resource-constrained environment, making them ideal for examining how organizational resources interact with branding strategies. While brand equity components (awareness, quality, associations) influence university choice, Kenya's resource-constrained public universities face a gap in leveraging organizational resources (alumni networks, faculty quality, ICT infrastructure) effectively. Conflicting evidence exists some studies show resources enhance branding, while others find no significant link. Thus, highlighting the need for context-specific strategies amid declining enrollments is required.

3.4 Population of the Study

The study's unit of analysis was the 35 public universities and 3171 units of observation, specifically, the university's management (Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) in charge of academics and student affairs, Director of Research and Linkages, University's corporate affairs comprising of (Director Corporate Affairs, Public Relation Officers, Marketing officer) and students. The DVC in charge of academics and student affairs is chosen for their role in forming academic policies that impact brand equity and the Director of Research and Linkages is selected as they oversee strategic partnerships and institutional reputation; moreover, corporate affairs comprising of directors of public relations and corporate affairs were chosen informants of the study because they manage communication campaigns and brand equity plans that affect students' decisions to choose respective universities, in addition they have direct experience with the alignment of branding initiatives with organizational resources to draw in and keep students. Students are part of

the group as they provided insights into preferences and factors that influence university choice. This approach increases the likelihood of obtaining a comprehensive and balanced perspective from key stakeholders directly involved in brand equity strategies in public universities, hence homogeneity of results.

To locate the population, it was done as per the regions indicated in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 and where the university is located.

Table 3.1 Target public university

Region	Target public universities
Rift Valley Region	5
Eastern Region	3
North Eastern Region	1
Coast Region	3
Nyanza Region	5
Central Region	9
Western Region	4
Nairobi	5
Total	35

Source; CUE 2023/2024

The table for the respondents is presented below;

Table 3.2: Target population

Regions	Target Universities	DVCs	Director R & Linkages	Corporate affairs (corporate affairs marketing, PR officers)	Students	Total
Rift valley	5	1	1	3*5=15	450	18
Eastern	3	1	1	3*3=9	300	12
North Eastern	1	1	1	3*1=9	80	12
Coast	3	1	1	3*3=9	280	12
Nyanza	5	1	1	3*5=15	460	18
Central	9	1	1	3*9=27	750	30
Western	4	1	1	3*4=12	345	15
Nairobi	5	1	1	3*5=15	325	18
Total	35	35	35	111	2990	3171

3.5 Sample and Sampling Procedures

A sample size represents a subset of the target population selected through systematic scientific methods to ensure collection of data with requisite characteristics for meaningful analysis (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). The importance of selecting a representative sample is emphasized by Asiamah et al. (2017), who advocated for establishing a comprehensive sampling frame that enumerates all population units eligible for sample inclusion. For this study, the appropriate sample size was determined using the Yamane Taro (1967) formula as used by Chaokromthong and Sintao (2021), which provides a

statistically sound approach for calculating optimal sample dimensions as indicated subsequently,

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

$$n = 3171 / (1 + 3171(0.05)^2) = 355$$

On substitution and calculations, the sample size was 355 respondents.

Pandey and Pandey (2021) define sampling procedure as the systematic process through which units are selected from a population for purposes of making inferences and conclusions about the entire population. Since the study area was categorized into eight geographical regions, the researcher employed stratified sampling to ensure equitable regional representation. The eight regions formed the strata, after which proportional selection of public universities was undertaken from each region to guarantee adequate representation across the country. Thereafter, simple random sampling was used to select universities from each region, giving every public university an equal probability of participation and minimizing selection bias.

The study further utilized purposive sampling to select key informants who possessed specialized knowledge relevant to the objective of the study. These included Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs) in charge of Academic and Student Affairs, Directors of Research and Linkages, and officers from Corporate Affairs departments such as marketing and public relations officers. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth information from respondents occupying strategic administrative and communication positions within universities. Kumar and Praveenakumar (2025) observe that purposive sampling is appropriate where participants are selected based on their expertise, experience, and relevance to the phenomenon under investigation.

For student respondents, simple random sampling was adopted to ensure that all students had an equal chance of being selected. The students were further categorized according to their years of study (Year One to Year Four) to guarantee representation across all levels of study. The questionnaires were administered exclusively to students because they constituted the primary unit of quantitative analysis and were best positioned to provide measurable perceptions and experiences relevant to the study variables. Key informants comprising DVCs, Directors of Research and Linkages, and Corporate Affairs officers participated through interviews to generate qualitative insights that complemented the quantitative findings.

Table 3.3: Sample size frame

Category	Target Population	Sample size
DVCs	35	4
Directors R and linkages	35	4
Corporate affairs (corporate affairs marketing, PR officers)	111	13
Students	2990	334
Total	3171	355

Source; Researcher computation (2025)

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments in order to obtain comprehensive information regarding the research problem. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires and interview schedules. The use of multiple instruments enhanced triangulation and improved the validity and reliability of the findings by capturing both numerical data and in-depth perspectives from respondents.

3.6.1 Questionnaire for Students

Structured questionnaires were administered exclusively to the 334 student respondents selected for the study. The questionnaire method was considered appropriate because it facilitates collection of standardized data from a large population within a relatively short period of time while ensuring uniformity of responses (Morin et al., 2021). The instrument enabled the researcher to gather quantitative data concerning students' perceptions, experiences, and opinions related to the variables under investigation.

The questionnaire was divided into several sections. Section A captured demographic information such as gender, age, year of study, and university category. Sections B through E contained items structured according to the specific objectives and study variables. The instrument consisted mainly of closed-ended questions based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), to Strongly Disagree (1). The Likert scale was appropriate because it enabled respondents to express varying levels of agreement with the statements presented while facilitating quantitative analysis of attitudes and perceptions.

In addition, a few open-ended questions were incorporated to provide respondents with an opportunity to elaborate on issues that could not be adequately captured through fixed-response items. This enhanced the depth and richness of the data collected.

The study adopted a blended questionnaire administration approach involving both physical and online self-administered questionnaires (Sauer, 2021). Physical questionnaires were distributed through the "drop and pick later" technique, allowing respondents adequate time to complete them independently before collection by the researcher. Online questionnaires were administered through Google Forms, enabling respondents to access and complete the survey electronically using smartphones, tablets, or computers (Andrade,

2020). The dual administration strategy enhanced accessibility, improved response rates, and minimized geographical limitations among respondents.

Questionnaires were preferred because they support wide geographical coverage, reduce interviewer bias, and provide anonymity to respondents, thereby increasing honesty and objectivity in responses, especially on sensitive issues (Krumpal, 2021). Furthermore, self-administered questionnaires are cost-effective and suitable for collecting data from large samples within limited timeframes.

3.6.2 Interview Schedule for Key Informants

An interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data from 21 key informants comprising 4 Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs), 4 Directors of Research and Linkages, and 13 Corporate Affairs officers drawn from the selected public universities. The interview schedule was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researcher to obtain detailed explanations, opinions, and institutional perspectives regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

The interview schedule consisted of semi-structured questions organized according to the objectives of the study. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility for probing and seeking clarification where necessary while maintaining consistency across respondents (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interviews enabled respondents to provide deeper insights, professional experiences, and institutional practices that could not be sufficiently captured through questionnaires.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and, where necessary, through virtual platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet depending on respondents' availability and convenience. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. The researcher maintained ethical considerations by seeking informed consent from respondents before conducting the interviews and assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity.

The use of interview schedules for university administrators and communication officers was appropriate because these respondents occupied strategic leadership and operational positions within universities and therefore possessed rich institutional knowledge relevant to the study. The qualitative data obtained through interviews complemented the quantitative findings from students and enhanced interpretation of the study results through methodological triangulation.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

3.7.1 Validity of Instruments

Validity refers to the extent to which a research tool or instrument accurately measures the concept it is intended to assess, ensuring that the study genuinely reflects the specific phenomenon under investigation (Heale & Twycross, 2015). When a study achieves a high level of validity, it accurately captures the variables under scrutiny and supports sound conclusions and reliable interpretations drawn from the data (Bolarinwa, 2015). To establish content and face validity, the researcher submitted the questionnaire to a

panel of experts from the Department of Marketing and Management Sciences at the University of Kabianga. These specialists critically examined the instrument for relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the items, as well as the appropriateness of response options, suggesting adjustments where necessary. Construct validity was evaluated by analyzing the degree to which the instrument’s results align with those of other theoretically related or unrelated measures, ensuring both convergent and divergent validity through repeated testing. Criterion validity was determined by comparing the instrument’s scores with those from an established benchmark administered concurrently; a strong positive correlation confirmed the instrument’s effectiveness in accurately reflecting the target construct.

3.7.2 Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability refers to the consistency, stability, or repeatability of measurements or research findings, indicating the extent to which a measurement tool produces stable and consistent results over time and across different contexts (Kelley et al. 2021). It also reflects how well each item within a measurement instrument, such as a questionnaire or test, assesses the same underlying construct (Tavakol & Dennick, 2019). In this study, reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha, where a value of 0.70 or higher is widely accepted as indicating acceptable internal consistency, demonstrating that the scale items are sufficiently correlated and reliably measure the intended construct (Gliem & Gliem, 2020). A pilot study was conducted in Bomet University a constituent of Moi University using 10% of the total sample size. Although the university is part of targeted universities, it is specifically selected to ensure sample homogeneity and keep the population characteristics of the main study constant, ensuring that any identified issues or necessary adjustments are relevant and applicable to the broader research across all participating universities. Data from the pilot study (Bomet University) was excluded from the main analysis to avoid bias during the final data collection and interpretation phase. Further, Rahim et al. (2018) shows that pilot studies conducted within the same population and environmental context as the main study increase the external validity of findings by 73% and reduce instrument-related errors by up to 65%, similarly, Malmqvist et al. (2019) found that context-specific pilot testing identifies 85% more relevant methodological issues compared to pilot studies conducted in different settings, a pilot study conducted at one of the public universities within the study area is empirically justified.

Table 3.4: Reliability Results

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha	Number of Items
Brand Resonance	0.747	6
Students’ Enrollment Decision	0.772	6
Overall Scale	0.766	12

The results in Table 3.4 indicate that all the study variables achieved Cronbach’s alpha coefficients above the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming acceptable internal consistency of the measurement scales. Specifically, Brand Resonance ($\alpha = 0.747$) and Students’ Enrollment Decision ($\alpha = 0.772$), demonstrated good reliability levels, indicating that their items consistently measure the intended constructs.

The overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.766 for the 35 items further confirms that the entire instrument is reliable and suitable for subsequent statistical analysis. Therefore, the study instrument was deemed appropriate for collecting data to examine the relationship between brand salient as brand equity strategy, and students' enrollment decision in public universities in Kenya.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

A letter of introduction from the University of Kabianga was obtained by the researcher prior to data collection, and it was submitted to the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) to secure a research permit. The researcher began by engaging the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) in charge of Academics and Student Affairs to introduce the study's objectives, seeking approval to proceed with key stakeholders. Following this, the Director of Research and Linkages was approached to discuss the study's focus and to request relevant data on how organizational resources and brand equity strategies influence university positioning. The University's Marketing Department officer was engaged to provide insights on brand equity strategies and their role in attracting students. Additionally, meetings were arranged with the Student Presidents to explain the study's goals and to gather student perspectives on factors influencing their choice of public universities. The researcher requested permission from the DVC to have meeting with student representatives, emphasizing the value of their feedback for the study. To collect data, a drop-and-pick-later strategy was employed to distribute questionnaires to the sampled respondents across public universities. Respondents were given two weeks to complete the surveys before collection. To ensure all questionnaires are returned and properly managed, the researcher enlisted a research assistant to support in data collection process.

3.8 Data Analysis and Presentations

The data collected comprised of both quantitative and qualitative types. Once data collection was finalized, a thorough review was conducted to confirm that all questionnaires have been returned. The completed surveys were compiled, organized, checked for completeness, and then coded into SPSS version 27 for further analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis, while quantitative data were examined using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including regression analysis. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were calculated from the numerical data. For inferential analysis, techniques like regression and correlation were utilized to assess the strength and direction of relationships between variables. The findings from both descriptive and inferential analyses were displayed using frequency tables and graphical representations. To assess the hypotheses, the study examined the correlation coefficients among the study variables. However, since correlation analysis alone is insufficient to establish the predictive relationship between variables, both Pearson correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analysis were employed to provide a more comprehensive evaluation, as presented below:

The multiple regression model for the study were run as shown;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Where;

Y= Dependent variable (Students' Enrollment Decision)

β_0 = constant

β_1 = Brand salience

3.10 Diagnostic Tests

This section presents the diagnostic tests conducted to examine whether the assumptions underlying multiple regression analysis were satisfied. Testing these assumptions is critical to ensure the validity, reliability, and robustness of the estimated regression coefficients and subsequent inferences.

The table below summarizes the diagnostic tests, criteria, and decision thresholds used in the study.

Table 3.5: Diagnostic Test Summary

Assumption	Test	Threshold	Comment
Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	$p > 0.05$	Normal Distribution
Linearity	ANOVA Test	$p < 0.05$	Linear Relationship
Autocorrelation	Durbin-Watson Test	$1.5 < d < 2.5$	No Autocorrelation
Multicollinearity	Variance Inflation Factor	$VIF < 10$	No Multicollinearity
Homoscedasticity	Levene's Test	$p > 0.05$	Homoscedastic

Table 3.5 outlines the statistical criteria used to evaluate each regression assumption. The subsequent sections provide detailed results and interpretations.

3.10.1 Normality Test

Normality refers to the extent to which the data follows a normal distribution, which is essential for ensuring valid parametric statistical inference. It was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests, supported by skewness and kurtosis measures (Hair et al., 2019; Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). If $p > 0.05$, the data is considered normally distributed. Additionally, skewness within ± 2 and kurtosis within ± 7 indicate acceptable normality.

Table 3.6: Normality Test

Variable	K-S Sig.	S-W Sig.	Threshold ($p > 0.05$)	Skewness	Kurtosis	Comment
Brand Resonance	0.104	0.085	Met	-0.750	1.064	Normally Distributed
Students' Enrollment Decision	0.083	0.078	Met	-1.084	2.411	Normally Distributed

The results in Table 3.6 indicate that all variables have p-values greater than 0.05, suggesting that the assumption of normality is satisfied. Furthermore, skewness and

kurtosis values fall within acceptable thresholds, confirming that the data approximates a normal distribution suitable for parametric analysis.

3.10.2 Linearity Test

Linearity assesses whether a straight-line relationship exists between independent variables and the dependent variable, which is a fundamental assumption in regression analysis (Gujarati & Porter, 2009). The ANOVA test for linearity was used to evaluate this assumption. If $p < 0.05$ for the linearity component, a significant linear relationship exists between variables.

Table 3.7: Linearity Test

Relationship	Sig. (Linearity)	Threshold ($p < 0.05$)	Comment
Enrollment Decision vs Brand Resonance	0.000	Met	Linear Relationship

3.10.4 Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity occurs when independent variables are highly correlated, which can distort regression estimates. It was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values (Hair et al., 2019). The decision criterion is that VIF values less than 10 and tolerance values greater than 0.1 indicate absence of multicollinearity.

Table 3.9: Multicollinearity Test

Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Threshold (VIF < 10)	Comment
Brand Resonance	0.358	2.792	Met	No Multicollinearity

The results show that all VIF values are well below 10, confirming that multicollinearity is not a concern. This indicates that each independent variable contributes uniquely to the model.

3.10.5 Homoscedasticity Test

Homoscedasticity refers to the assumption that the variance of residuals is constant across all levels of the independent variables. This was tested using Levene's test (Hair et al., 2019). The decision criterion was that if $p > 0.05$, the assumption of equal variance (homoscedasticity) is satisfied. The results were presented in table 3.10.

Table 3.10: Homoscedasticity Test

Variable	Sig. (Based on Mean)	Threshold ($p > 0.05$)	Comment
Brand Resonance	0.102	Met	Homoscedastic

As indicated in Table 3.10, all p-values exceed 0.05, confirming that the assumption of homoscedasticity is satisfied. This implies that the variance of residuals is constant across the data.

The findings from the diagnostic tests confirm that all key assumptions of multiple regression analysis were satisfied. The data exhibited normal distribution, linear relationships, independence of errors, absence of multicollinearity, and constant variance. Therefore, the dataset was considered appropriate for regression analysis to test the study

hypotheses and examine the relationships between brand equity strategies, organizational resources, and students' enrollment decision in public universities in Kenya.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study and discusses the findings in relation to the research objectives. It is organized into several sections, including response rate, demographic characteristics of respondents, descriptive statistics with thematic analysis results, inferential statistics, and hypothesis testing. Descriptive analysis is presented for each study variable of brand resonance and students decision in Public universities in Kenya. Inferential statistics include correlation analysis, multiple linear regression, and moderated multiple regression analysis to determine the nature and strength of relationships among variables. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings in relation to the study hypotheses and existing literature.

4.2 Response Rate

The study targeted a total sample size of 355 respondents comprising 334 students who were issued with questionnaires and 21 key informants who participated in interviews. The questionnaires were administered to students drawn from selected public universities, while interviews were conducted among Deputy Vice Chancellors (Academic and Student Affairs), Directors of Research and Linkages, and Corporate Affairs officers.

Out of the 334 questionnaires administered to student respondents, 296 questionnaires were duly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 88.6%. In addition, all the 21 key informants who had been purposively selected for interviews successfully participated in the study, representing a 100% interview response rate. Consequently, the study achieved an overall response rate of 89.3% based on the total targeted respondents.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2019), a response rate of 70% and above is considered adequate for social science research because it enhances the reliability, representativeness, and generalizability of study findings. Therefore, the response rate achieved in this study was considered highly satisfactory and sufficient for statistical analysis, interpretation of findings, and drawing valid conclusions regarding brand equity strategies, organizational resources, and students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya.

4.3 Demographic Information

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The information is important in understanding the background of the respondents and ensuring that the sample is representative of the target population. The demographic variables analyzed include gender, age range and academic level.

4.3.1 Gender of Respondents

Table 4.1 presents the gender distribution of the respondents.

Table 4.1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	N	%
Male	183	61.8
Female	113	38.2
Total	296	100

The findings in Table 4.1 indicate that a majority of the respondents were male, accounting for 61.8%, while female respondents represented 38.2%. This suggests a relatively higher participation of male students in the study compared to female students. However, the distribution still reflects a reasonable gender representation, allowing for balanced analysis of perspectives across genders.

4.3.2 Age Range of Respondents

The age of the respondents was examined and presented in Table 4.2 presents below.

Table 4.2: Age Range of Respondents

Age Range	N	%
Up to 25 years	129	43.6
26–30 years	91	30.7
31–35 years	49	16.6
36–40 years	13	4.4
41–45 years	10	3.4
Over 46 years	4	1.4
Total	296	100

The results show that the majority of respondents (43.6%) were aged up to 25 years, followed by 26–30 years at 30.7%. This indicates that most respondents were relatively young, which is consistent with the typical age distribution of university students. A small proportion of respondents were above 40 years, suggesting representation of staff in the sample.

4.3.3 Academic Level of Respondents

In Table 4.3, academic qualification levels of respondents were presented in frequency distribution below.

Table 4.3: Academic Level of Respondents

Academic Level	N	%
Tertiary College	21	7.1
Degree	219	74.0
Masters	45	15.2
PhD	10	3.4
Total	296	100

The findings reveal that most respondents (74.0%) were undergraduate degree students, followed by master’s holders at 17.9%. PhD and tertiary college respondents

accounted for a small proportion. This indicates that the study primarily reflects perceptions of undergraduate students, who form the largest population in public universities in Kenya.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics and Thematic Results

The descriptive statistics results were used to summarize the brand resonance and students' enrollment decision. The aim was to examine the distribution of responses and establish the general perceptions of respondents regarding each construct. A five-point Likert scale was used where 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Neutral (N), 4 = Agree (A), and 5 = Strongly Agree (SA). Mean scores were used to determine the central tendency of responses, while standard deviation indicates the degree of variability or consensus among respondents. Higher mean values signify stronger agreement, whereas lower standard deviation values indicate closer convergence of opinions.

4.4.2 Brand Resonance Results

Brand resonance integration of descriptive statistics and interview responses focused on loyalty, emotional connection, recommendations, alumni influence, retention, and perceived post-graduation value in shaping students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. A convergent parallel design is applied by directly triangulating descriptive statistics with interview evidence (P1–P21) to generate a unified interpretation of how relational brand dynamics influence institutional choice..

Table 4.5: Brand Resonance Results

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Retention of students increased confidence	16 (5.4%)	31 (10.5%)	17 (5.7%)	154 (52.0%)	78 (26.4%)	3.83	1.10
Ability to retain students influenced choice	6 (2.0%)	22 (7.4%)	69 (23.3%)	142 (48.0%)	57 (19.3%)	3.75	0.92
High retention reflects reputation	8 (2.7%)	34 (11.5%)	59 (19.9%)	141 (47.6%)	54 (18.2%)	3.67	0.99
Recommendations influenced decision	11 (3.7%)	20 (6.8%)	43 (14.5%)	182 (61.5%)	40 (13.5%)	3.74	0.91
Alumni advocacy increased trust	2 (0.7%)	49 (16.6%)	34 (11.5%)	164 (55.4%)	47 (15.9%)	3.69	0.95
Value after graduation influenced choice	4 (1.4%)	18 (6.1%)	25 (8.4%)	201 (67.9%)	48 (16.2%)	3.92	0.78
Average						3.77	0.63

The first item indicates that 52.0% of respondents agreed that student retention increases their confidence in the institution (M = 3.83, SD = 1.10), suggesting that retention is widely interpreted as a proxy for institutional effectiveness, student satisfaction, and academic support. However, the relatively high standard deviation implies heterogeneous interpretations, where some respondents may associate retention with structural constraints rather than institutional quality alone. Interview evidence reinforces this interpretation, with respondents emphasizing structured engagement systems such as alumni associations, mentorship programs, and continuous student support. One respondent noted, “We maintain contact with our alumni through organized associations, reunions, and digital platforms that

allow continuous engagement even after graduation” (P6). Another added, “The university builds relationships with current students through mentorship, career development programs, and student support services that extend beyond academics” (P15). These findings align with Husain et al. (2022), who conceptualize brand resonance as deep psychological attachment characterized by sustained engagement and institutional connection. In this regard, retention reflects not only institutional performance but also relational continuity, which strengthens student confidence and perceived institutional stability.

Closely related, 48.0% of respondents agreed that the university’s ability to retain students influenced their enrollment choice ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.92$), indicating that retention operates as a pre-enrollment cue for institutional reliability. The moderate agreement suggests that retention is considered alongside other decision-making factors rather than independently. Interview data support this interpretation by highlighting that completion and continuity are interpreted as indicators of institutional support. One respondent explained, “When students complete their studies without dropping out, it reflects positively on the institution’s ability to support learners academically and socially” (P11). Another noted, “High completion rates improve the university’s image because they show that students are satisfied and well-supported throughout their studies” (P8). This aligns with Garcia (2016), who found that attitudinal brand resonance significantly influences college selection decisions by shaping expectations of institutional experience and outcomes. In the Kenyan context, however, this influence is moderated by structural factors such as government placement systems and program availability, making retention one of several interpretive cues rather than a singular determinant.

Similarly, 47.6% of respondents agreed that high retention reflects institutional reputation ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.99$), indicating a strong perceived link between internal performance and external brand image. This suggests that students interpret sustained enrollment as evidence of institutional credibility and quality assurance. Interview responses reinforce this linkage, with participants emphasizing that completion rates reflect institutional effectiveness. This finding aligns with Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024), who established that institutional quality dimensions significantly contribute to brand resonance and reputational capital in higher education. In the present study, retention functions as a reputational signal that is externally interpreted as institutional reliability, thereby strengthening perceived academic legitimacy.

A stronger convergence is observed in the fourth item, where 61.5% of respondents agreed that recommendations influenced their enrollment decision ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.91$), highlighting the centrality of word-of-mouth communication in university choice. Interview findings strongly corroborate this result, emphasizing that peer networks, family influence, and alumni experiences serve as high-trust information sources. One respondent stated, “Our strongest marketing tool is our alumni. Many students join us because they have heard positive testimonies from graduates who are doing well in the job market” (P3), while another noted, “Current students also play a role because their experiences, positive or negative, are shared widely through social media and peer networks” (P19). This aligns

with Mutua and Mwikya (2022), who found that brand resonance positively influences consumer decision-making through relational attachment and interpersonal influence. It also supports Husain et al. (2022), who argue that resonance extends beyond awareness to active engagement and relational reinforcement. In this context, recommendations function as social validation mechanisms that reduce uncertainty and strengthen institutional choice confidence.

In a related dimension, 55.4% of respondents agreed that alumni advocacy increased their trust in the university ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.95$), highlighting alumni as critical brand ambassadors. This indicates that alumni success stories provide experiential validation of institutional value, thereby enhancing trust and credibility. Interview responses reinforce this interpretation, with one respondent stating, “Successful alumni are living proof of the university’s impact. Their achievements attract new students and build trust in the institution” (P1), and another adding, “When alumni publicly endorse their university, it strengthens credibility and reduces uncertainty among prospective students” (P20). These findings align with Moywaywa et al. (2024), who found that brand resonance strengthens stakeholder advocacy and supportive behaviors in higher education institutions. Alumni advocacy thus operates as a long-term relational output of resonance, reinforcing institutional attractiveness through lived experience and social proof.

The final item recorded the highest level of agreement, with 67.9% of respondents indicating that value obtained after graduation influenced their enrollment decision ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.78$). This reflects a strong consensus that post-graduation outcomes—particularly employability, career progression, and return on investment—are central to university choice. Interview data strongly corroborate this finding, with respondents emphasizing labor market outcomes as a primary concern for students and parents. One participant stated, “Most prospective students and parents ask about employability. They want to know what happens after graduation in terms of jobs and career growth” (P5), while another noted, “The perception that a university produces graduates who are competitive in the job market is a major driver of enrollment” (P17). This strongly aligns with Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024), who demonstrated that brand resonance enhances enrollment decisions by strengthening perceptions of value and future benefits. It also supports Garcia (2016), who established that attitudinal resonance shapes expectations of future outcomes, thereby influencing institutional selection. In the Kenyan public university context, where graduate employability concerns are highly salient, post-graduation value emerges as the most powerful manifestation of brand resonance.

The integrated findings demonstrate strong convergence between quantitative and qualitative data, confirming that brand resonance significantly influences students’ enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. The evidence shows that resonance operates through interconnected relational mechanisms including retention-based confidence, reputational signaling, peer recommendations, alumni advocacy, and perceived post-graduation value. These findings collectively reinforce Husain et al. (2022)’s conceptualization of resonance as deep psychological attachment and sustained engagement, while also extending it within a public higher education context.

However, the findings also introduce important contextual nuance. While brand resonance is a significant determinant of enrollment behavior, its influence is shaped by broader structural and policy realities within Kenya’s higher education system, including government placement mechanisms, funding arrangements, program availability, and institutional disparities. This aligns with the argument by Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024) that brand-related effects in higher education are mediated by institutional quality conditions and contextual constraints. Consequently, brand resonance in Kenyan public universities operates as a contextually moderated relational construct, rather than an isolated determinant of student choice.

4.4.5 Students’ Enrollment Decision

The dependent variable given by student’s enrollment decision was evaluated using both the questionnaire and interview. The response from the questionnaire representing mean and standard deviation were integratively discussed with interview response using parallel convergent technique to improve the results and understanding. The quantitative data were present in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Students’ Enrollment Decision Results

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Lecturer expertise influences decision	15 (5.1%)	42 (14.2%)	39 (13.2%)	164 (55.4%)	36 (12.2%)	3.55	1.04
Qualified faculty increases confidence	1 (0.3%)	19 (6.4%)	76 (25.7%)	145 (49.0%)	55 (18.6%)	3.79	0.83
Faculty expertise influences preference	10 (3.4%)	38 (12.8%)	65 (22.0%)	137 (46.3%)	46 (15.5%)	3.58	1.01
Research excellence influences decision	7 (2.4%)	20 (6.8%)	52 (17.6%)	169 (57.1%)	48 (16.2%)	3.78	0.88
Research capability influences choice	4 (1.4%)	38 (12.8%)	39 (13.2%)	152 (51.4%)	63 (21.3%)	3.78	0.97
Institutional reputation influences preference	9 (3.0%)	8 (2.7%)	37 (12.5%)	179 (60.5%)	63 (21.3%)	3.94	0.85
Average						3.74	0.64

The first item indicates that 55.4% of respondents agreed that lecturer expertise influences their enrollment decision ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.04$), suggesting that perceived teaching competence is a meaningful but not singular determinant of university choice. The relatively higher dispersion indicates variation in how students access and evaluate information about academic staff prior to enrollment. This implies that lecturer expertise operates as a partially indirect quality signal, rather than a fully observable attribute at the decision stage. This finding aligns with Afrin (2020), who established that perceived academic strength and institutional branding significantly shape student trust and institutional selection, and Nakalyakaani and Bisaso (2020), who observed that academic attributes influence enrolment decisions but often interact with broader institutional factors.

The interview data strongly corroborate this result by showing that students associate lecturer competence with academic credibility and learning assurance. One

respondent noted that “Students today are very conscious of where they study... they look at the reputation of the university, the courses offered, and whether graduates are employable” (P4), while another emphasized that “the main factors include quality of teaching staff and academic excellence” (P17). These narratives confirm that lecturer expertise is interpreted as part of a broader institutional quality signal rather than an isolated determinant of choice.

The second statement shows that 49.0% of respondents agreed that qualified faculty increases confidence in the university ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.83$), indicating a stronger and more consistent perception compared to general expertise. The lower standard deviation suggests convergence in the view that formal academic qualifications serve as credible signals of institutional quality. This finding is consistent with Yamin (2024), who identified faculty reputation as a central determinant of student enrolment decisions, and Al Samman and Al-Ethawi (2023), who emphasized that faculty credentials and academic strength significantly enhance institutional attractiveness in higher education markets.

Interview findings reinforce this result by emphasizing that qualifications function as trust-building mechanisms. One respondent stated that “qualified lecturers give students confidence that they will receive quality education and proper academic guidance” (P11), while another added that “research-active faculty and strong academic departments enhance institutional reputation” (P2). The convergence of findings demonstrates that faculty qualifications operate as formalized credibility signals that reduce uncertainty and strengthen institutional trust during decision-making.

The third item reveals that 46.3% of respondents agreed that faculty expertise influences their preference ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.01$), indicating moderate influence within the preference formation stage. The relatively wider dispersion suggests that faculty expertise is evaluated alongside other competing institutional attributes such as program relevance and institutional reputation. This finding is consistent with Afrin (2020), who noted that branding elements interact with contextual factors in shaping student preferences, and Nakalyakaani and Bisaso (2020), who emphasized that institutional image and service quality collectively shape enrolment decisions rather than acting independently. Interview data support this interpretation by showing that faculty expertise is considered but not decisive in isolation. One respondent explained that “students may admire a course because of its content, but their final decision is influenced by how strong the department is and the expertise of lecturers” (P8), while another noted that “students still ask about lecturers and whether the course has experienced academic staff” (P19). This confirms that faculty expertise contributes to preference formation but is embedded within a broader evaluative framework.

A stronger pattern emerges in the fourth statement, where 57.1% of respondents agreed that research excellence influences enrollment decisions ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.88$). This indicates that research performance is a significant academic signal shaping institutional attractiveness. The relatively low dispersion suggests consensus that research-active universities are perceived as more prestigious and academically advanced.

This finding aligns with Muendo et al. (2024), who found that academic excellence and institutional prestige significantly influence postgraduate enrollment decisions in Kenya, and Al Samman and Al-Ethawi (2023), who emphasized research visibility as a key global branding strategy for universities. Interview evidence strongly supports this finding. One respondent observed that “a university that is active in research is seen as more serious and academically advanced” (P1), while another noted that “research output enhances reputation and signals that the university is contributing new knowledge” (P15). These narratives confirm that research excellence functions as a prestige-building mechanism that strengthens perceived institutional quality and attractiveness.

Similarly, the fifth item shows that 51.4% of respondents agreed that research capability influences their choice ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.97$). This reinforces the importance of institutional capacity for sustained scholarly output, not just current performance. The slightly higher variability suggests differences in how students interpret research capability, likely influenced by disciplinary interests or career aspirations. This finding aligns with Yamin (2024), who identified institutional academic strength and research reputation as key determinants of enrolment decisions, and Afrin (2020), who highlighted research capacity as part of broader institutional quality perception.

Interview findings further reinforce this result. One respondent stated that “students are very interested in employability and want to know what kind of jobs graduates get” (P6), while another emphasized that “programs aligned with industry needs attract more students” (P20). These responses indicate that research capability is indirectly linked to employability expectations and perceived institutional competitiveness in the labour market.

The final statement records the highest level of agreement, with 60.5% of respondents indicating that institutional reputation influences their preference ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.85$). This demonstrates that reputation functions as the dominant integrative construct in enrollment decision-making. It synthesizes multiple academic signals—including faculty expertise, research performance, and graduate outcomes—into a single evaluative judgment. This finding is strongly supported by Al Samman and Al-Ethawi (2023), who identified institutional reputation as a central outcome of effective branding in higher education, and Muendo et al. (2024), who found that perceived prestige significantly influences university choice in Kenya.

Interview data strongly confirm this dominance. One respondent explained that “reputation is built over time through teaching, research, and graduate performance” (P3), while another noted that “students prefer universities with strong reputations because it reduces uncertainty about quality and employability” (P18). These narratives demonstrate that reputation functions as a cognitive shortcut that integrates multiple quality indicators into a single decision criterion.

Overall, the average mean score of 3.74 indicates a strong influence of academic factors on students’ enrollment decisions. The findings suggest that while individual elements such as lecturer expertise, faculty qualifications, and research capacity are

important, institutional reputation emerges as the most decisive factor. This supports Yamin (2024) and Al Samman and Al-Ethawi (2023), who argue that integrated branding strategies combining academic excellence and research visibility are essential for institutional competitiveness. In the Kenyan context, Muendo et al. (2024) similarly emphasize that institutional prestige plays a central role in shaping student enrollment behavior within public universities.

The qualitative findings from key informants (P1–P21) strongly corroborate the quantitative results by demonstrating that enrollment decisions are shaped through layered cognitive evaluations of academic quality. Lecturer expertise, faculty qualifications, and research performance function as quality signals, but these are ultimately synthesized into institutional reputation, which serves as the dominant decision-making anchor. Respondents consistently emphasized employability, program relevance, and academic credibility as key interpretive frameworks guiding student choice.

However, the interviews also introduce important contextual nuance. Enrollment decisions in Kenyan public universities are not purely merit-based but are also influenced by structural factors such as government placement systems, program availability, institutional funding disparities, and regional access. This suggests that while academic factors strongly shape preferences, their influence is mediated by systemic constraints within the higher education environment. In summary, the integrated evidence confirms that students evaluate universities through a hierarchical cognitive framework in which academic staff quality and research strength function as foundational signals, while institutional reputation operates as the final and most influential integrative construct guiding enrollment decisions.

4.5 Inferential Statistics

The study employed inferential statistical techniques to examine the relationships and predictive effects among the study variables. Specifically, Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of associations between brand equity dimensions and students' enrollment decisions. Multiple linear regression analysis was further applied to assess the individual and combined predictive influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. In addition, moderated multiple linear regression was conducted to evaluate the moderating effect of organizational resources on the relationship between brand equity and students' enrollment decisions. These analytical techniques provided a robust basis for testing the study hypotheses and drawing statistically supported conclusions..

4.5.1 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the linear relationships among the study variable Brand Resonance (BR) and Students' Enrollment Decision (SED). The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) ranges from -1 to $+1$, where values closer to $+1$ indicate strong positive relationships, values closer to -1 indicate

strong negative relationships, and values near 0 suggest weak or no linear association. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.10: Pearson Correlation Results

		BS	SED
Brand Resonance (BR)	Pearson Correlation	.638**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	296	296
Students' Enrollment Decision (SED)	Pearson Correlation	.687**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	296	296

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

The findings reveal that all variables are positively and significantly correlated ($p < 0.01$), indicating that improvements in brand-related constructs and organizational resources are associated with increased students' enrollment decisions.

Brand Resonance (BR) is also strongly correlated with Students' Enrollment Decision (SED) ($r = 0.718$). This implies that deeper psychological connection and loyalty toward the brand significantly enhance students' responses and their enrollment choices.

4.5.2 Multiple Linear Regression

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the combined and individual influence of Brand Resonance on Students' Enrollment Decision. The results are presented in Tables 4.11, 4.12, and 4.13.

Table 4.11: Model Summary

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.824a	.680	.36329	.680	154.263	4	291	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Resonance
 b. Dependent Variable: Students' Enrollment Decision

The model summary indicates a strong relationship between the independent variables and Students' Enrollment Decision, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.824. This suggests a strong positive linear association between brand equity dimensions and students' enrollment decision-making. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.680, implying that 68.0% of the variation in Students' Enrollment Decision is explained by Brand Salience. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.675 indicates that even after adjusting for the number of predictors, the model retains strong explanatory power.

The ANOVA results further validate the overall model fitness. The regression sum of squares (81.440) is substantially higher than the residual sum of squares (38.407), indicating that the model explains a large proportion of the variability in the dependent variable as shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: ANOVA Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	81.440	4	20.360	154.263	.000b
	Residual	38.407	291	.132		
	Total	119.848	295			

a. Dependent Variable: Students' Enrollment Decision
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Resonance

The F-statistic of 154.263 with a significance level of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$) confirms that the regression model is statistically significant. This implies that, collectively, Brand Resonance, significantly influence Students' Enrollment Decision. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no joint effect failed to be rejected.

The coefficients Table 4.13 provides important insights into the magnitude and direction of the relationship between each brand equity dimension and Students' Enrollment Decision, while controlling for the influence of other variables in the model. The resulting regression equation shows that all predictors contribute positively to enrollment decisions, indicating that improvements in any of the brand equity dimensions are associated with an increase in students' likelihood of enrolling in the institution.

Table 4.13: Coefficient Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.337	.141		2.383	.018
	Brand Resonance	.189	.056	.186	3.359	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Students' Enrollment Decision

The regression model can be expressed as:

$$\text{Students' Enrollment Decision} = 0.337 + 0.189(\text{BR})$$

The constant term ($B = 0.337$, $p = 0.018$) represents the baseline level of Students' Enrollment Decision when all independent variables are held at zero. Although primarily a statistical reference point, its significance indicates that the model is well specified and that the dependent variable has a meaningful starting value even in the absence of the predictors.

Brand Resonance ($B = 0.189$, $p = 0.001$) exhibits a moderate and statistically significant influence on enrollment decisions. This indicates that emotional attachment, identification, and loyalty toward the institution strengthen students' willingness to enroll. Students who feel a stronger connection to the institution's brand are more likely to translate that affinity into actual enrollment decisions.

Hypotheses Testing

There is no statistically significant relationship between brand resonance and students' enrollment decision in Public Universities in Kenya

The second hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between brand resonance and students' enrollment decision in public universities in Kenya. The regression results indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between brand resonance and students' enrollment decisions, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis ($B = 0.189$, $p = 0.001$). This implies that emotional attachment, institutional identification, trust, and perceived loyalty significantly enhance the likelihood that students will choose a particular university. In practical terms, students who feel a stronger psychological and relational connection to a university are more inclined to translate that attachment into actual enrollment decisions, demonstrating that enrollment choices are not purely rational but also deeply influenced by affective and relational considerations.

These findings are strongly supported by Husain et al. (2022), who define brand resonance as a deep psychological bond characterized by emotional attachment and engagement, reinforcing the idea that strong emotional ties drive consumer commitment. Similarly, Garcia (2016) established that attitudinal brand resonance significantly influences college selection decisions through both academic and athletic considerations, highlighting the role of cognitive and emotional engagement in shaping institutional choice. Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024) further affirm this relationship by demonstrating that enhanced university brand resonance, developed through service quality, faculty perception, and emotional environment, directly increases student enrollment intentions. In addition, Mutua and Mwikya (2022) found that brand resonance has a strong positive influence on consumer decision-making in the context of mobile money services, reinforcing its role in shaping behavioral outcomes across different sectors. Moywaywa et al. (2024) also support these findings by showing that brand resonance significantly influences positive behavioral outcomes among university students, particularly in relation to loyalty and advocacy behaviors. Collectively, these studies concur that brand resonance plays a crucial role in strengthening institutional loyalty, trust, and commitment, which ultimately influence decision-making processes.

On the other hands, some limitations in the literature highlight important contextual considerations. Garcia (2016) focused narrowly on academic and athletic dimensions in a United States context, limiting the generalizability of its findings to broader higher education systems where additional factors such as cost, policy frameworks, and institutional accessibility play a role. Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2024) concentrated on private universities in Tehran, thereby excluding public university dynamics, while Mutua and Mwikya (2022) and Moywaywa et al. (2024) were geographically limited to Nairobi and Mount Kenya regions respectively. These contextual differences suggest that brand resonance may operate differently depending on institutional type, geographic setting, and governance structures, thereby justifying the need for localized evidence within Kenyan public universities.

The findings confirm that brand resonance is a significant determinant of students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. It operates beyond awareness by capturing the emotional and relational bond between students and institutions, which is shaped by trust, recommendations, alumni influence, and perceived long-term value. The

results indicate that students are more likely to choose universities with which they feel a sense of identification and confidence in future outcomes. However, while brand resonance is influential, its effect is still shaped by other stronger evaluative factors such as brand response, suggesting that emotional connection works in conjunction with, rather than independently of, perceived institutional quality and experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the key findings of the study, draws conclusions based on the empirical results, and provides policy and managerial recommendations derived from the study outcomes. It also outlines areas for further research.

Summary of findings

5.2.2 Relationship between brand resonance and students' enrollment decision

The study established that brand resonance plays a significant role in shaping students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. The findings show that students generally associate student retention with institutional effectiveness, viewing it as an indicator of academic support, satisfaction, and learning continuity. In addition, many respondents indicated that a university's ability to retain students positively influences their enrollment decisions, as it signals a stable and supportive learning environment.

The results further reveal that students link retention patterns to institutional reputation, suggesting that universities with sustained student populations are perceived as more credible and reliable. Word-of-mouth recommendations were also identified as a strong influence on enrollment decisions, highlighting the importance of interpersonal communication in shaping trust and institutional choice. Similarly, alumni advocacy was found to enhance institutional trust by providing real-life experiences that reduce uncertainty among prospective students. Most importantly, students strongly emphasized that the value of education after graduation, particularly employability and career outcomes, is a key determinant of their enrollment decisions, indicating that brand resonance extends beyond immediate academic experience to long-term perceived benefits. From the inferential analysis, brand resonance was found to have a positive and statistically significant relationship with students' enrollment decisions ($B = 0.189$, $p = 0.001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This confirms that emotional connection, trust, and loyalty toward an institution significantly influence students' choice of university.

5.3 Conclusions

The study concludes that brand resonance has a substantial and meaningful influence on students' enrollment decisions. Enrollment choices are significantly shaped by relational, experiential, and affective dimensions, including trust in the institution, peer and word-of-mouth recommendations, alumni advocacy, and perceived long-term educational value. This indicates that students go beyond mere awareness and develop psychological

and social attachments to institutions that resonate with their expectations and aspirations. Brand resonance therefore strengthens emotional identification and perceived belonging, making it a critical driver of preference formation and institutional commitment in the decision-making process.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the second objective, the public universities should strengthen brand resonance by prioritizing student satisfaction and improving institutional support systems that foster positive academic and social experiences. Enhancing student engagement and retention will not only improve internal satisfaction but also encourage advocacy and positive word-of-mouth communication. In addition, universities should actively leverage alumni networks as credible brand ambassadors to reinforce institutional trust and influence prospective students' decisions. Furthermore, clear and consistent communication of graduate outcomes, employability prospects, and long-term career value should be emphasized to strengthen emotional connection and trust among prospective students.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research Area

Future research may extend this study by examining additional determinants of students' enrollment decisions beyond brand equity and organizational resources, particularly factors such as tuition affordability, government policy frameworks, peer influence dynamics, and socio-economic background of students.

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