

## SHAPING STUDENT PATHWAYS: HOW DIGITAL MARKETING INFLUENCES SCHOOL CHOICE AT SMKS KENCANA BANDUNG

Anisa Rahmadina<sup>1</sup>, Puspo Dewi Dirgantari<sup>2</sup>, Nining Setiawati<sup>3</sup>, Truong Thanh Tuyen<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Economics and Business Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Jalan Dr. Setiabudi No.229,

<sup>3</sup>SMKS Kencana Bandung, Jalan Babakan Surabaya No.44

<sup>4</sup>Ton Duc Thang University, 19 Nguyen Huu Tho Street, Tan Hung Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

E-mail: [anisarahmadina65@upi.edu](mailto:anisarahmadina65@upi.edu) ; [puspodewi@upi.edu](mailto:puspodewi@upi.edu) ; [niningsetiawati93@gmail.com](mailto:niningsetiawati93@gmail.com)

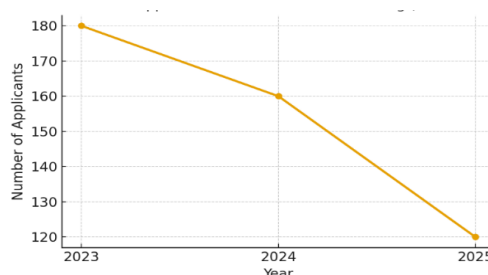
### ABSTRACT

The advancement of information and communication technology has transformed the educational landscape, including the marketing strategies employed by vocational schools. Between 2023 and 2025, SMKS Kencana Bandung experienced a reduction in applicants from 180 to 120, underscoring the importance of innovating promotional and communication strategies. This study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing on students' decisions in choosing SMKS Kencana Bandung. This study uses a quantitative approach with a verificative design. The research population consists of all 120 tenth-grade students in the 2025/2026 academic year, and because all members of the population are included, this study uses a census sampling technique. The digital marketing variable was measured using five dimensions: attraction, engagement, retention, learning, and communication. The student decision variable was assessed through three dimensions: need recognition, information search, and alternative evaluation. The research instrument is a structured questionnaire with a 1-5 Likert scale consisting of 32 statement items. Data analysis was conducted using simple linear regression with the help of SPSS version 25.0. Results reveal that digital marketing exerts a positive and significant influence on students' choices of SMKS Kencana Bandung, demonstrating a strong linear association. These findings confirm that improving the quality and consistency of digital marketing implementation directly increases the probability of prospective students choosing the school. This study suggests that SMKS Kencana Bandung's management should focus on developing an integrated digital platform, producing informative and engaging content, and enhancing social media responsiveness to counter the declining number of applicants.

**Key words:** Digital Marketing; Students Decision-Making; Private Vocational Schools; Education

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology in the digital era has affected almost all sectors, including education. Vocational high schools (SMKs) serve a strategic function in preparing skilled workers capable of competing in the global labor market. Since 2016, vocational education, particularly Vocational High Schools (SMK), has received strong priority and special attention from President Joko Widodo. His commitment was formalized through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2016 concerning the revitalization of Vocational High Schools, aimed at enhancing the quality and competitiveness of Indonesia's human resources. In this instruction, the President directed the Ministry of Education and Culture to build synergy across ministries and institutions in order to address the challenges of the demographic bonus and strengthen Indonesia's position in the global market (Sohidin, 2018). However, in practice, a significant gap remains. Although the national participation rate in secondary education is relatively high, private vocational schools (SMKs) still face difficulties in sustaining their competitiveness and appeal. Based on data from Statistik Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan Tahun 2024/2025, there were 14,326 SMKs in the 2024/2025 academic year, consisting of 3,776 public schools (26.36%) and 10,550 private schools (73.64%). This dominance of private institutions intensifies competition among them in attracting students (Kemendikdasmen, 2025).



**Figure 1. Number of Applicants at SMKS Kencana Bandung (2023-2025)**

The case of SMKS Kencana Bandung reflects this dynamic, with a decline in the number of new registrants from 180 (2023) to 160 (2024) and 120 (2025), highlighting the urgency of innovation in promotional and communication strategies. Previous studies indicate that digital marketing functions as a key tool to enhance school image, broaden audience reach, and foster emotional engagement among prospective students.

Instagram, TikTok, and social media platforms have been shown to significantly boost visibility and prospective student interest in vocational schools, though consistent content scheduling and limited human resources remain frequent impediments (Haryati & Safitri, 2025). A prototype digital marketing system at a vocational institute in Padang showed increased enrollment rates and higher user satisfaction when interactive digital tools and responsive marketing strategies were implemented (Mudhoffar & Widayat, 2024). A case study at Global University Jakarta revealed that Google Ads and social media marketing had a positive effect on both prospective students' interest in enrollment and their actual registration decisions (Wijaya et al., 2023). These findings highlight a clear gap: while prior research confirms the potential of digital marketing tools in both vocational and higher education settings, there is still scant empirical evidence that specifically dissects which digital marketing tools or practices (e.g., platform type, frequency, budget, institutional capacity) are most effective in the Indonesian vocational school (SMK) environment under competitive pressure from private institutions.

Nevertheless, most studies have focused primarily on promotional aspects and social media, while other variables such as school image, digital engagement, and the role of parental trust have rarely been tested simultaneously in the context of private SMKs (Malik et al., 2015). Furthermore, local research specifically situated in Bandung, an area with the highest concentration of private SMKs in Indonesia, remains relatively limited. This highlights a research gap between the broad theoretical frameworks of digital marketing and the empirical challenges faced by private vocational schools in a highly competitive environment.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to analyze the impact of digital marketing on student decision-making in choosing SMKS Kencana Bandung. More specifically, this research seeks to identify the most influential dimensions of digital marketing and examine the potential mediating roles of school image and parental trust. The findings are expected to offer theoretical contributions to the literature on vocational education marketing and provide practical guidance for private SMKs in developing more effective, contextually relevant, and student-centered promotional strategies. Digital marketing in education is framed by five key dimensions: attraction, engagement, retention, learning, and communication, which are essential for building lasting relationships with target audiences (Mohammed, 2024). Student decision-making, on the other hand, involves need recognition, information search, and alternative evaluation, reflecting a structured process of consumer choice (Daryanto, 2011)

Yet, most studies have only applied these frameworks partially, focusing narrowly on promotional tools such as social media without integrating them into a holistic model that connects digital marketing dimensions to student decision-making. This creates a theoretical gap where the linkage between marketing practices and student choices in vocational education remains underdeveloped. Empirical studies globally demonstrate the positive impact of digital marketing on enrollment; however, research in Indonesia, especially in vocational schools, remains limited and primarily focuses on visibility rather than mediating factors such as school image and parental trust. Local evidence in Bandung, where private SMKs face the highest competition, remains scarce. Therefore, this study aims to examine how digital marketing influences student decision-making in choosing SMKS Kencana Bandung.

## METHOD

This study is a small-scale research project that utilizes a quantitative approach. This study used a verificative research design to test hypotheses concerning their impact on student decision-making. The research was conducted at SMK Kencana Bandung, Jalan Babakan Surabaya No. 44, beginning in September 2025. The population consisted of all 120 tenth-grade students in the 2025/2026 academic year, and because all members of the population were included, the study used a census sampling technique, which observes every unit in the population to ensure accuracy and eliminate sampling error (Etikan, 2017). The study consisted of two variables: the independent variable (X) was digital marketing, measured through five dimensions: attraction, engagement, retention, learning, and communication (Mohammed, 2024). The dependent variable (Y) was student decision-making, consisting of three dimensions: need recognition, information search, and alternative evaluation (Alamsyah et al., 2023). Both variables were operationalized into indicators and measured using a structured questionnaire consisting of 32 items, rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) (Fehrenbacher, 2013).

The questionnaire was adapted from validated theoretical frameworks and tested for validity and reliability prior to use; items were declared valid if the correlation coefficient was greater than 0.30 (Ghozali, 2014), while Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of  $\geq 0.70$  indicated acceptable reliability (Leguina, 2015). The data analysis process comprised three stages. First, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics. Second, assumption tests, including normality and linearity, were conducted to ensure the appropriateness of the data for regression analysis (Mohd Razali & Bee Wah, 2011). Finally, a simple linear regression analysis was performed using the equation.

$$Y=a+bX,$$

Y : represents student decision-making  
 X : represents digital marketing  
 a : constant  
 b : regression coefficient

The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0 with a significance level set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The research paradigm was structured as Digital Marketing (X) → Student Decision-Making (Y),



**Figure 2. Research Model**

with hypotheses formulated as follows:

- H0: Digital marketing has no significant effect on student decision-making at SMK Kencana Bandung;
- H1: Digital marketing has a significant effect on student decision-making at SMK Kencana Bandung.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study revealed that digital marketing exerts a significant positive effect on students’ decisions to select SMKS Kencana Bandung for their vocational education. These results support the research hypothesis, indicating that a more effective digital marketing strategy leads to greater interest and stronger enrollment decisions among prospective students. Digital marketing effectively reaches a wide and targeted audience, especially the digital native generation who actively use social media to seek educational information. Approaches such as providing informative website content, leveraging social media promotions, implementing digital advertisements, and showcasing alumni testimonials effectively build positive perceptions and strengthen trust among prospective students and their families. This aligns with the Hierarchy of Effects Model, which explains that marketing communications influence consumers through stages of awareness, preference, and finally decision-making. In the context of vocational education, digital marketing acts as a key communication channel that introduces programs, facilities, achievements, and career opportunities while supporting previous research that found digital promotion significantly increases enrollment compared to conventional methods.

The significant role of digital marketing in influencing students’ school choice is also driven by the rising competition among vocational schools in the digital era. With many options available, students and parents rely on accessible, accurate, and credible information to make decisions. Digital marketing meets this demand by delivering interactive and captivating content, such as virtual school tours, live-streamed events, and alumni success stories, that boost engagement and foster trust. Consistency, transparency, and responsiveness in digital communication further enhance credibility and directly influence students’ final decisions. The findings emphasize that strengthening digital marketing strategies is crucial for SMKS Kencana Bandung to attract more prospective students and enhance its competitiveness in today’s educational landscape. To offer a deeper insight into the study’s findings, the following section presents a detailed statistical analysis and interpretation using SPSS output tables, providing empirical evidence of the relationship between digital marketing and students’ decision-making in selecting SMKS Kencana Bandung.

**Table 1. ANOVA**

			Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	sig
Student Decision-Making Digital Marketing	Between groups	(Combined)	6745.260	109	61.883	15.811	.000
		Linearity	4161.524	1	4161.524	1063.267	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	2583.736	108	23.923	6.112	.002
	Within Groups		39.139	10	3.914		
Total			6784.400	119			

(Source: SPSS 25)

Based on the results of the ANOVA test conducted using SPSS version 25 with a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , it was found that the regression model between digital marketing and students' decisions in choosing SMKS Kencana Bandung was significant with an F value of 15.811 and  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the regression model was suitable for explaining the relationship between the two variables. The linearity test results showed an F value of 1063.267 with  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), which means that the relationship between digital marketing and student decisions is linear and statistically significant. However, the deviation from linearity test yielded an F value of 6.112 with a p value of 0.002 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating significant non-linear variation. It can therefore be concluded that although the main relationship is linear, there are other factors outside the model that also influence student decisions, such as recommendations from friends or family, school reputation, and the facilities offered. Thus, these results support the hypothesis (H1) that digital marketing has a significant effect on students' decisions in choosing SMKS Kencana Bandung.

**Table 2. Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.783 <sup>a</sup>	.613	.610	4.71463

a. Predictors: (Constant), Digital Marketing

b. Dependent Variable: Student Decision-Making In Choosing SMKS Kencana Bandung.

(Source: SPSS 25)

Based on the results of the analysis in Table 2. Model Summary, an R value of 0.783 was obtained, indicating a strong and positive relationship between the digital marketing variable and students' decisions in choosing SMKS Kencana Bandung. The R Square value of 0.613 indicates that 61.3% of the variation in student decisions can be explained by the digital marketing strategies implemented by the school, while the remaining 38.7% is explained by other factors outside the scope of this study, such as the influence of family recommendations, school reputation, location, cost, or facilities offered. The Adjusted R Square value = 0.610, which is almost the same as R Square, indicates that the regression model is stable and does not experience overfitting, so the estimation results can be trusted to describe the relationship between variables. In addition, the Standard Error of the Estimate = 4.71463, which is relatively small, indicates that the deviation between the observed and predicted values is low, so the model has good accuracy in predicting student decisions based on the level of digital marketing effectiveness. Overall, these results reinforce the findings of the previous ANOVA test that digital marketing plays a significant and substantial role in influencing students' decisions to choose SMKS Kencana Bandung, so that strengthening digital marketing strategies is a strategic step to increase applicant interest and school competitiveness in the digital era.



**Figure 1. Research Procedure**

Figure 1 illustrates the research procedure applied in this study, consisting of three main stages: problem identification, data collection, and analysis of results using SPSS 25. The process begins with identifying the research problem and formulating the objectives and hypotheses. The next step involves collecting relevant data through questionnaires distributed to respondents based on the census sampling method. Finally, the collected data are analyzed using statistical tools in SPSS 25 to test the hypotheses and determine the influence of digital marketing on students' decision-making in choosing SMKS Kencana Bandung.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on students' decisions to choose SMKS Kencana Bandung for their vocational education. This finding confirms the research hypothesis and highlights that effective digital marketing strategies—covering attraction, engagement, retention, learning, and communication play a key role in shaping students' choices through the stages of need recognition, information search, and evaluation. The strong linear relationship between the variables indicates that enhancing the quality and consistency of digital marketing will increase the likelihood of student enrollment amid rising competition among private vocational schools. Theoretically, this study strengthens the relevance of the Hierarchy of Effects Model in explaining digital communication within vocational education marketing. Practically, it suggests that SMKS Kencana Bandung should invest in integrated digital

platforms, engaging content, responsive communication, and alumni-based credibility building. Future studies are encouraged to examine mediating factors such as school image and parental trust, as well as compare the effectiveness of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and school websites in improving student recruitment outcomes.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who have provided support during the completion of this study, especially to those who contributed through guidance, feedback, and technical assistance throughout the research process.

## REFERENCES

- Alamsyah, A., Bukhori, M., & Agustina, T. (2023). Pengaruh Brand Image, Digital Marketing Dan Reference Group Terhadap Keputusan Siswa Memilih Sekolah Di Madrasah Aliyah Muhammadiyah 1 Malang. *Jurnal Ilmiah Riset Aplikasi Manajemen*, 1(2), 365–375. <https://doi.org/10.32815/jiram.v1i2.27>
- Daryanto. (2011). *Sari Kuliah Manajemen Pemasaran*. PT Sarana Tutorial Nurani Sejahtera Place.
- Etikan, I. (2017). Sampling and Sampling Methods. *Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal*, 5(6), 215–217. <https://doi.org/10.15406/bbij.2017.05.00149>
- Fehrenbacher, D. D. (2013). *Operationalization and Data Analysis Methods*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-33599-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-33599-0_5)
- Ghozali, I. (2014). *Model Persamaan Struktural. Konsep dan Aplikasi dengan Program AMOS 24. Update Bayesian SEM*. Badan Penerbit Universitas Diponegoro.
- Haryati, E., & Safitri, C. (2025). Strategi Digital Marketing pada Pendidikan Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK). 9(2), 666–676. <https://doi.org/10.29408/jpek.v9i2.30905>
- Kemendikdasmen, P. (2025). *Statistik Smk 2024/2025*.
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing Management* (Vol. 17).
- Leguina, A. (2015). A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 38(2), 220–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727x.2015.1005806>
- Malik, S. A., Mushtaq, A., Jaswal, L. H., & Malik, S. A. (2015). Survey on marketing tactics used to build private school image and increase parents' loyalty. *The International Journal of Management Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMIE.2015.068761>
- Mohammed, S. J. (2024). Digital Marketing and its Role in Customer Engagement. *American Journal of Economics and Business Management*, 7(8), 414–422. <https://doi.org/10.31150/ajebm.v7i8.2895>
- Mohd Razali, N., & Bee Wah, Y. (2011). Power comparisons of Shapiro-Wilk, Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Lilliefors and Anderson-Darling tests. *Journal of Statistical Modeling and Analytics*, 2(1), 13–14.
- Mudhoffar, R. R. A. F., & Widayat, W. (2024). Indonesian Journal of Computer Science. *Indonesian Journal of Computer Science*, 13(2), 3169–3181. <http://ijcs.stmikindonesia.ac.id/ijcs/index.php/ijcs/article/view/3135>
- Sohidin, S. (2018). *Revitalizing of Vocational High Schools for Productivity Improvement and Graduates Competitiveness (Standard Formatting for Alternative Excellence of Vocational High Schools)*. 262(9), 46–56. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ictte-18.2018.9>
- Wijaya, H., Andri, R. C., & Rachmawati, D. (2023). Analysis of Digital Marketing Strategies on Interest and Enrollment Decisions of Prospective New Students in Private Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia (a Case Study of Jakarta Global University). *Klabat Journal of Management*, 4(2), 147. <https://doi.org/10.60090/kjm.v4i2.1007.147-162>