Brand Salience and Students' Enrollment Decision in Public Universities in Kenya

Tonui Cheruiyot Wesley[1], Dr. Lydia Langat[2], Dr. Janet Kimeto[3]

University of Kabianga

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100600564

Received: 11 June 2026; Accepted: 16 June 2026; Published: 30 June 2026

ABSTRACT

In today's competitive higher education environment, universities are increasingly required to develop strong brand salience in order to attract students, enhance institutional reputation, and sustain enrollment growth. Despite public universities in Kenya holding a significant share of the higher education market, they continue to experience declining student enrollment, largely due to increased competition from private institutions and challenges in effectively converting brand equity salience into actual recruitment outcomes. The purpose of this study was to examine brand salience and students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to determine the relationship between brand salience and students' enrollment decisions. The study was anchored on the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model and Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which collectively explain how brand perceptions, institutional capabilities, and behavioural intentions influence decision-making processes. 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 size of 355 was selected by using Taro Yamane's formula. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered through a blended approach of online and physical distribution, Interview schedules was also conducted to key informants (DVC, Corporate Affairs, Director Linkages and Resource Mobilization) on what they do about branding. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including multiple regression analysis, with the aid of SPSS version 27. The findings revealed that dimensions of brand salient significantly influence students' enrollment decisions as brand salience ($B = 0.110$, $p = 0.045$). The qualitative results for the key in informants were also discussed. The study concludes brand salience has a statistically significant but foundational influence on students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. Its primary role is to generate initial awareness, visibility, and mental availability of institutions within a highly competitive higher education environment.

Keywords: Brand Salience, Brand Awareness, Institutional Choice, Public Universities, Mental availability.

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive world, developing great brand equity has become vital to higher education institutions' success. Keller's (1993) in his fundamental work model defined brand equity as the differential influence of brand awareness on consumer response, recent research has greatly expanded on this concept. Studies have shown that brand equity is now both a key performance metric and a source of long-term competitive advantage (Rauschnabel et al., 2022). In higher education industry, it translates into practical results such as greater applicant numbers, better student retention, and stronger alumni participation. A university's reputation remains its most valuable intangible asset (Khan, & Yildiz, 2020); Teeroovengadum et al., 2022). Robust branding differentiates institutions in a crowded market, attracting high-caliber faculty, competitive students, and strategic partnerships. For example, universities ranking highly in global brand metrics (QS World Rankings) report disproportionate advantages in research funding and industry collaboration (Marginson, 2023). Local visibility also benefits through community loyalty, as consistent branding fosters pride among current students and alumni (Pinar et al., 2022).

Recent study has identified brand salient as part of brand equity as a multidimensional construct made up of four critical components that work together to improve institutional competitiveness. Brand salience, as evaluated by digital visibility metrics and assisted recall tests (Almeida & Santos, 2023), is the critical first touchpoint, with research suggesting that top-performing colleges have 23-25% higher application rates due to superior brand recognition (Chen et al., 2022). Pinar et al. (2020) discovered that service quality is the most significant predictor of student choice among critical brand equity characteristics studied in Turkey and the United States. Panda et al. (2019) assessed service quality in India and the United States, utilizing accreditation history and third-party indices to determine trustworthiness. They discovered that tradition was more important in India by 31%, whereas both cohorts rated service quality equally. Dholakia and Acciardo (2023) polled experts in Italy and the United States and identified micro-credential visibility (badge adoption), sustainability (STARS ratings), and AI responsiveness (chatbot satisfaction) as key emerging indicators expected to influence 38% of brand perception by 2025.

In the United Kingdom, Rutter et al. (2022) investigated digital engagement (website traffic and social media indicators) and discovered that institutions with outstanding online strategies obtained 23% more applications. In the United Kingdom, Hemsley-Brown et al. (2020) discovered that website analytic (bounce rates, session duration) and social media activity (shares/comments) were related with an 18% increase in applicant quality. In another findings from UK, Chapleo and Clark (2021) constructed a Brand Attachment Index measuring institutional pride, alumni identity (social media ties), and advocacy (referral likelihood), which predicted retention with ±3% accuracy. In Canada, Belanger et al. (2022) discovered that outcome disclosure (employment data completeness) and accessibility (report readability) resulted in 17% more applications.

Branding in higher education has become a strategic necessity, especially for public universities striving to differentiate themselves in a competitive academic landscape. Recent studies underscore that university brand equity comprising brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty significantly influences student satisfaction and engagement. For instance, a Vietnamese universities study found that these dimensions of brand equity positively affect student satisfaction and engagement (Le Na et al., 2025). Similarly, research conducted in Indonesia and Malaysia indicates that brand equity and service quality substantially impact university reputation and students' intention to choose these institutions (Rizard et al., 2023). These findings highlight the importance of a comprehensive branding strategy that aligns with student expectations and experiences. Moreover, emphasis has been put on the role of university brand credibility and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in shaping brand preference and choice intention among students in Sri Lanka and Vietnam (Perera et al., 2023). Together, these studies suggest that universities must cultivate strong brand equity through consistent service quality, positive brand associations, and effective communication to attract and retain students in an increasingly competitive environment.

Minh and Mai (2024) investigated how brand awareness measured through student familiarity, institutional recognition, and information accessibility impacts revenue generation in Vietnamese higher education institutions. It demonstrated that strong brand awareness directly shapes institutional reputation (perceived prestige and trustworthiness) and student decision-making (enrollment choices and attraction of high-achieving applicants). Key drivers of awareness included digital presence (well-structured websites, active social media engagement) and admission outreach (targeted events, clear communication of institutional value). This underscored that effective dissemination of academic offerings, facilities, and outcomes through these channels significantly boosted enrollment and financial performance. The research advises universities to prioritize brand visibility strategies, such as optimizing digital platforms and personalized recruitment campaigns, to enhance both market position and revenue sustainability. While focused on Vietnam, the study offers transferable insights for global institutions competing in increasingly digitalized education markets.

Rizad et al. (2023) compared how brand equity (comprising brand awareness, loyalty, perceived quality, and associations) and service quality (including academic resources, administrative efficiency, and student support services) shape the reputations of two Islamic universities Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) in Indonesia and International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and influence Indonesian students' enrollment intentions. Both institutions, which offer hybrid curricula (Islamic and general studies), compete with profane universities like the University of Indonesia (UI). Brand equity's sub-constructs particularly perceived academic quality and institutional prestige and service quality dimensions, such as teaching effectiveness and campus facilities, was alluded to significantly enhance institutional reputation. This reputation, in turn, drove student choice, with IIUM outperforming UIN due to stronger perceived value. While the research confirmed the mediating role of reputation between brand/service factors and student intentions, it highlighted the unmet need to analyze the moderating effect of study expenses (for example., tuition, living costs) (resource). The findings underscore how Islamic universities can leverage brand-building sub-components and service excellence to attract students in a competitive higher education market.

Sabri and Nazri (2023) examined how brand equity dimensions namely brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty influence laptop purchase intentions among Malaysian university students. Guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the study revealed that perceived quality and brand loyalty were significant positive drivers of purchase decisions, while brand awareness and brand associations exerted a negative influence. The findings suggest that laptop manufacturers should prioritize improving product quality and strengthening customer loyalty rather than relying solely on brand recognition or abstract brand associations. The study provides useful strategic insights for marketers targeting student consumers but acknowledges limitations in terms of sample scope and contextual focus. To address the identified knowledge gap, future studies are recommended to incorporate additional explanatory variables such as price sensitivity, after-sales service, social influence, perceived value, and technological innovation, as well alongside organizational resources including infrastructure, human capital, and learning facilities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of brand equity's influence on technology-related purchase behaviour.

In Spain, Retamosa et al. (2019) explored holistic branding approaches, evaluating brand awareness, associations, and loyalty, concluding that integrated approaches improved recall by 18% and retention by 12%. In Australia, Sultan and Wong (2023) examined alumni testimonials and discovered that emotionally charged stories increased conversions by 14%. In South Africa, Joseph et al. (2021) cited academic reputation (ranking awareness), employability (job placement rates), and campus culture as the most relevant criteria, with 82% of students relying on digital media for information.

Modern understanding of university brand equity have evolved into sophisticated, multi-layered frameworks that use both traditional marketing ideas and novel measuring methods. Recent research (Khoshtaria et al.,2023; Khoa and Nguyen, 2023) confirms the enduring relevance of core brand equity dimensions - perceived quality, awareness, loyalty, and emotional connection - while demonstrating their measurement through advanced methodologies such as SERVQUAL-HE scales for hybrid learning environments (Martinez-Ortega et al., 2023), digital footprint analysis (Lee & Zhang, 2022), and psycho-physiological response testing (Nikolaeva et al., 2022). These core elements, which account for 68-72% of the variance in student satisfaction in multinational studies (Khoa et al., 2023), work in tandem with supporting value-creation elements such as critical digital infrastructure (Wilson et al., 2022) and AI-powered career outcome tracking (Ozdemir & Dedeoglu, 2023).

According to Kuriakose and Mathew (2023), higher education brand ecosystems comprise three interrelated levels: hygiene factors that reduce dissatisfaction, core experiential learning values that shape students' perceptions, and transformational outcomes that encourage long-term advocacy. Conceptually, this framework aligns with the proposed study by acknowledging that brand-related attributes influence student decision-making; however, it differs in scope and emphasis. Whereas Kuriakose and Mathew (2023) focused primarily on brand advocacy and long-term outcomes, the present study concentrates on students' choice of public universities as the immediate decision outcome and operationalizes brand equity using brand salience, brand imagery, brand response, and brand resonance, which is consistent with Keller's brand equity model.

Chen et al. (2023) empirically demonstrated the importance of contextualized brand equity strategies, reporting through structural equation modeling that culturally aligned branding dimensions accounted for approximately 29–33% of the variance in students' institutional preference in selected Asian universities ($p < 0.05$). While this finding supports the relevance of brand equity dimensions similar to those proposed in the current study, it does not incorporate organizational resources as a moderating factor. In contrast, the proposed study explicitly introduces organizational resources such as academic staff capacity, infrastructure, and learning facilities to examine how they condition the relationship between brand equity strategies and students' university choice.

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) interact with organizational resources to influence students' choice of public universities in Kenya, which the proposed study seeks to address.

The most forward-thinking institutions now view brand equity management as a continuous process of value co-creation, with digital transformation initiatives and immersive learning ecosystems (Garcia-Lopez et al., 2023) supplementing core academic offerings to create comprehensive, culturally relevant brand experiences. The shift from static brand positioning to dynamic, data-driven equity development represents higher education's response to an increasingly competitive global economy and more discerning student populations.

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.

On the other hand, Nakalyakaani and Bisaso (2020) examine the relationship between school branding and student enrolment in private secondary schools in Iganga Municipality in Uganda, revealing positive but weak relationships between student enrolment and three branding dimensions: school image, school culture, and customer care.

Studies conducted in Kenya highlight the strategic role of brand salience and brand resonance in influencing both consumer and institutional choice decisions, supported by empirical evidence across sectors. Nyamwaya and Muchunku (2021), focusing on Multimedia University of Kenya, reported that rebranding efforts led to a noticeable improvement in brand recognition, with average perception scores rising from 3.1 to 4.0 on a five-point scale. Nevertheless, the study revealed lingering challenges, as approximately 42% of respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the university's brand messaging, indicating that heightened visibility alone

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VI June 2026

may not sufficiently drive positive choice outcomes. In the telecommunications sector, Mwaura and Mang'ana (2023) established that brand salience had a significant positive effect on Airtel Kenya's market share, accounting for about 21% of observed growth, with the relationship remaining statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This finding demonstrates the tangible influence of strong brand visibility on consumer choice decisions.

Bonareri (2022) had found that rapid expansion of higher education has heightened the importance of brand equity in shaping student enrollment decisions. However, despite its critical role, public universities have experienced declining enrollments in recent years. A study by Bonareri et al. (2022), anchored on Keller's Brand Equity Model, found that brand equity accounts for 57% of variations in customer citizenship behavior among students in Mount Kenya region universities, with a 0.912-unit increase in such behavior for every marginal improvement in brand equity. Underscoring the need for universities to strengthen advertising, marketing campaigns, and brand image management including perceptions of cleanliness and credibility to enhance brand awareness and foster positive customer citizenship behavior, ultimately reversing enrollment declines.

Another study by Ndung'u, (2023) examined how customer-based brand equity dimensions (awareness, association, perceived quality, loyalty) influence institutional ratings of private universities. Revealing that all four dimensions significantly impacted university ratings. Brand awareness helped institutions stand out in students' consideration sets, while positive associations strengthened institutional image. Perceived quality, judged through tangible cues, proved crucial, and loyalty strategies enhanced retention. The study recommended social media branding for awareness, relationship-building for associations, quality faculty recruitment for perceived excellence, and value-creation strategies for loyalty. These findings underscore brand equity's vital role in private universities' competitive positioning and reputation management within Kenya's higher education sector.

From above extant growing body of literature on brand equity in higher education it revealed several unresolved tensions and contextual gaps that warrant examination in Kenya's public universities. Rauschnabel et al. (2022) confirmed brand equity as both a performance metric and competitive advantage, while Stephenson (2016) and Teeroovengadum et al. (2022) emphasized institutional reputation as a critical intangible asset. However, these studies largely overlook how organizational resources - whether financial, human, or technological - interact with brand equity strategies to influence student choice.

Recent multidimensional approaches to brand equity further complicate this picture. Studies employing advanced measurement techniques (Almeida and Santos, 2023; Lee and Zhang, 2023) have decomposed brand equity into salience, imagery, response, and resonance components, with leading institutions reporting 15-20% gains in key performance indicators (Dedeoglu and Wilson, 2023). Yet these sophisticated frameworks rarely account for resource disparities between institutions. For instance, Pinar et al.'s (2020) finding that service quality predicts student choice while Minh and Mai's (2024) think digital visibility metrics may not translate directly to resource-constrained in public universities.

The Kenyan context presents unique challenges and opportunities for testing these relationships. Ndung'u's (2023) study on private universities showed all brand equity dimensions significantly impacted ratings, while Rizad et al. (2023) highlighted how Islamic universities compete through brand and service quality. However, public universities face distinct constraints - from aging infrastructure to funding limitations - that may alter how brand equity components affect student choice. FakhrEldin's (2023) Egyptian study found perceived quality most influential, but whether this holds true in Kenya's public sector remains untested hence the need for the current study on determine; Brand Equity Strategies, Organization Resource and Students' Choice of Public Universities in Kenya.

Objective of the Study

The study sought to determine Relationship between Brand Salience, and Students' Enrollment Decision in Public Universities in Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

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

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.

Brand Salience and Students' Enrollment Decision in Public Universities

Kubetzek (2022) asserted that brand salience, which is the degree to which a brand is easily and conspicuously remembered, and it reflects the breadth and depth of brand awareness. In the context of higher education, it measures how easily stakeholders and potential students can identify and recall a university while making decisions.

Minh and Mai (2024) explored the impact of brand salience on revenue generation in Vietnam's top five universities, emphasizing its role in shaping institutional reputation and student decisions. Using a mixed-method approach, the study finds that brand salience significantly influences admission choices and attracts high-quality students, stressing the need for effective communication through websites, social media, and events. It recommended broader, context-specific investigations to determine whether these effects hold beyond elite institutions and across different education systems. However, the study's focus on elite Vietnamese institutions limits generalization to mid-tier universities, rural populations, or contexts like Kenya, where education systems and policies differ. It overlook possible moderating factor that is organizational resource which may reshape how brand salience influences Kenyan students' decisions. Moreover, public universities in Kenya vary widely in size, age, academic strengths, and regional identity, suggesting that the relationship between salience and student choice may not be linear or uniform. These gaps call for localized, inclusive research on brand salience in developing higher education markets as the proposed study to be done in Kenya. The findings are expected to reveal new contextual findings, practical recommendations, and nuanced relationships that previous studies could not capture within their settings.

Rizard et al. (2023) aimed to compare the impact of brand equity comprising of brand salience, loyalty, perceived quality, and associations) and service quality (including academic resources, administrative efficiency, and service quality on universities' reputations, namely Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) in Indonesia and International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in Malaysia, and Indonesian students' intention to choose the universities. The statistical measurement tool used was structural equation modeling. The number of items stated in the questionnaire was 45. Therefore, minimum data to be collected were 5 × 45 or 225 which rounded up to 228 from Indonesian students at UIN and IIUM (114 UIN students, and 114 Indonesian student respondents from IIUM. The study results show that the universities' reputations are strongly affected by their brand equity such as salience and service quality, which then affect students' intention to choose the universities. Students had a higher intention to choose IIUM than UIN. Nonetheless but the study was limited to Indonesian students choosing between two Islamic universities. This context differs substantially from Kenya's public university landscape, where factors such as government-regulated admissions (through Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service(KUCCPS)), varying institutional resources, regional disparities, and intense competition for limited spaces influence student decision-making. Additionally, Kenyan public universities operate within a unique policy environment shaped by fluctuating government funding, Competency-Based Education and Training-driven transitions, and perceptions of graduate employability, none of which are captured in the Indonesian Malaysian comparison. Therefore, because the findings from the previous study are drawn from culturally and institutionally distinct higher education systems, they cannot be directly applied to Kenya, creating a clear context gap regarding how brand salience influences students' choices within local public universities.

Sabri and Nazri (2023) conducted a quantitative study in Malaysia to examine the impact of brand equity dimensions specifically brand awareness and perceived quality on laptop purchase intentions among public university students, using the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) as a theoretical framework. Data were collected through surveys and analyzed using statistical methods, revealing that perceived quality significantly influences purchase intention, while brand salience does not. Despite its contributions, the study presents several gaps methodologically, it relies solely on quantitative data without triangulating with qualitative insights; geographically, it is limited to Malaysian consumer electronics market, a context that differs significantly from the Kenyan higher education environment. The laptop market involves commercial purchasing decisions influenced by pricing, product specifications, and personal preferences, whereas university choice in Kenya is shaped by public policy, government sponsorship, availability of academic programs, and national perceptions of institutional prestige restricting broader applicability; population-wise, it focused only on public university students, excluding non-student demographics; conceptually, it overlooks other brand equity components such as brand loyalty and brand association hence the need for a context specific study as proposed.

Yiadom et al. (2025) investigated how brand salience influences students' choice of higher education institutions, using a positivism approach and quantitative data from 345 students at a Ghanaian Technical University. Analyzing responses via SPSS and Smart PLS, the study finds that institutional brand salience significantly impacts student decisions, emphasizing the role of branding in enrollment. The authors suggest that universities should cultivate and promote a distinct brand personality to stand out in a competitive market. Through identifying key brand salience factors, institutions can refine marketing strategies, strengthen their reputation, and meet enrollment goals. However, methodologically, its reliance on self-reported data from a single institution limits generalization of its findings. The focus on technical education excludes broader university types, and the student sample overlooks parental and socio-cultural influences on decision-making. Geographically, findings from Ghana may not apply to regions with different educational policies or market dynamics such as Kenya. Contextually, the study does not address resource constraints affecting branding efforts in underfunded institutions as a moderator variable. These gaps highlight the need for multi-institutional, cross-cultural research incorporating diverse stakeholders to better understand brand salience in higher education as proposed in the current study in Kenya.

Nyamwaya and Muchunku (2021) assessed brand salience campaigns carried out due to identity rebranding of Multimedia University of Kenya, guided by organizational image management theory and used qualitative research using purposive sampling to data from 32 internal and external key stakeholders of the University using in-depth interviews guided by two interview guides. Informants were asked questions that focused on brand recall, brand recognition, brand advantage and activities for visibility. It revealed mixed outcomes regarding Multimedia University of Kenya's brand salience campaigns following its identity rebranding. While stakeholders criticized inadequate marketing efforts, they recognized that the university's transition from college status while preserving its established reputation in telecommunications engineering, ICT, and media communication actually enhanced brand salience. However, marketing university facilities faced significant obstacles, particularly resistance from government organizations whose employees preferred external training venues to secure additional allowances. This institutional barrier highlighted systemic challenges in leveraging facilities for brand salience and revenue generation. The study identified potential solutions through geographic diversification, suggesting the university should target stakeholders outside the capital city and focus on private sector partnerships to overcome these government-related marketing constraints and improve facility utilization.

Mwaura and Mang'ana (2023) investigated the impact of brand salience on Airtel Kenya's market share growth using a descriptive research design. Primary data was collected via questionnaires and interviews with 100 subscribers and 34 employees in Nairobi, supplemented by secondary data from company and regulatory reports. Analyzed using SPSS v.27, the findings reveal a strong positive relationship between brand salience and market share. The study recommends sustained advertising, promotions, and publicity to enhance brand salience. However, it examine how brand salience contributes to Airtel Kenya’s market share growth within the telecommunications sector, a commercial environment that differs fundamentally from Kenya’s public higher education context. Telecom customers make decisions based on pricing, network quality, promotions, and service convenience, whereas Kenyan students choose public universities within a policy-driven system shaped by placement body, government sponsorship, program availability, institutional reputation, and socio-cultural influences. Their study also focuses solely on respondents in Nairobi, a setting with higher connectivity, advertising intensity, and brand exposure than many rural or semi-urban areas where a large proportion of Kenyan students reside. Because of these significant contextual differences, the findings on brand salience in the telecom sector cannot be directly applied to university selection behavior, highlighting the need for a localized study within Kenya's public university environment limiting generalization to other regions, and the absence of competitor analysis to contextualize Airtel's performance. Contextually, it focused on Airtel Kenya's market share growth, unlike the current that seeks to be conducted in public universities in Kenya.

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 utilized 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.

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).

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 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.

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).

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.

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

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.

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 equity strategies and organizational resources (the independent variables), 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 con-founders (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.

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.

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

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VI June 2026

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 make 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.

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;

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VI June 2026

Table 3.2: Target population

Regions	Target Universities	DVCs	Director R & and Linkages	Corporate affairs (corporate affairs marketing, PR officers)	Students	Total
Rift valley	5	1	1	3*5 =15	450	475
Eastern	3	1	1	3*3=9	300	315
North Eastern	1	1	1	3*1=9	80	91
Coast	3	1	1	3*3=9	280	295
Nyanza	5	1	1	3*5=15	460	485
Central	9	1	1	3*9=27	750	795
Western	4	1	1	3*4=12	345	365
Nairobi	5	1	1	3*5=15	325	350
Total	**35**	**35**	**35**	**111**	**2990**	**3171**

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 study objectives. 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

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VI June 2026

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)

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.

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.

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.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

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.

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 Salience	0.763	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 Salience ($\alpha = 0.763$), 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.

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 begun 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 was 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.

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

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VI June 2026

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;

$Y= ß_0 + ß_1X_1+$

Where;

Y= Dependent variable (Students' Enrollment Decision)

β0= constant

β_1= Brand salience

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.

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 Salience	0.059	0.053	Met	-1.097	1.564	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.

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VI June 2026

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 Salience	0.000	Met	Linear Relationship

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 criterio 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 Salience	0.372	2.685	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.

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 Salience	0.053	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

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 salience.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.

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.

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.

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.

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

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VI June 2026

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.

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	%
University/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.

Descriptive Statistics and Thematic Results

The descriptive statistics results were used to summarize the brand salient study variables. The aim was to examine the distribution of responses and establish the general perceptions of respondents regarding each construct.

Brand Salience Results

The integrated findings on brand salience, focusing on how online visibility, search presence, and digital branding influence students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. A convergent parallel approach is applied whereby descriptive statistical results are directly triangulated with interview evidence (P1–P21) to generate a unified interpretation of the findings.

Table 4.4: Brand Salience Descriptive Results

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean	Std. Dev.
The online visibility of this university on social media platforms influenced decision to consider it for higher education.	13 (4.4%)	40 (13.5%)	23 (7.8%)	179 (60.5%)	41 (13.9%)	3.66	1.02
Consistent and high online visibility helped it stand out	8 (2.7%)	18 (6.1%)	91 (30.7%)	131 (44.3%)	48 (16.2%)	3.65	0.92
High website traffic reflects popularity and influenced interest	9 (3.0%)	38 (12.8%)	71 (24.0%)	143 (48.3%)	35 (11.8%)	3.53	0.96
Frequent appearance in online searches influenced choice	6 (2.0%)	22 (7.4%)	53 (17.9%)	183 (61.8%)	32 (10.8%)	3.72	0.83
University brand is well-represented online	7 (2.4%)	35 (11.8%)	31 (10.5%)	177 (59.8%)	46 (15.5%)	3.74	0.94

Visibility attracts more students	15 (5.1%)	16 (5.4%)	16 (5.4%)	191 (64.5%)	58 (19.6%)	3.88	0.95
Average						3.70	0.63

The first item indicates that 60.5% of respondents agreed that social media visibility influenced their consideration of the university (M = 3.66, SD = 1.02). This suggests that social media platforms constitute a primary interface through which prospective students encounter and evaluate universities, shaping initial awareness and institutional consideration. The relatively higher standard deviation reflects heterogeneity in reliance on social media as an information source, implying that while a substantial proportion of students depend on it, others rely on alternative channels such as institutional websites or interpersonal networks. This finding is consistent with Kubetzek (2022), who conceptualizes brand salience as the ease of recall and recognition during decision-making, and with Minh and Mai (2024), who argue that digital communication channels significantly enhance institutional visibility and admission decisions. Interview evidence strongly corroborates this pattern, with respondents noting that students' first interaction with universities often occurs online. One participant observed that "Most students first encounter the university through platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok. These platforms shape the first impression students develop about the institution" (P3), while another noted that "If a university is not active online, many prospective applicants assume it is less competitive or less relevant" (P11). The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that social media visibility functions as an entry-point mechanism that frames early awareness and institutional legitimacy.

The second statement shows that 44.3% of respondents agreed that consistent and high online visibility enabled the university to stand out from competitors (M = 3.65, SD = 0.92). This indicates moderate agreement that sustained digital engagement contributes to brand differentiation. The relatively lower dispersion suggests reasonable consensus on the importance of consistency in reinforcing recognition and recall. This finding aligns with Yiadom et al. (2025), who established that institutional brand salience significantly influences students' choice of higher education institutions by strengthening visibility and distinctiveness in competitive markets. It also resonates with Nyamwaya and Muchunku (2021), who found that sustained visibility enhances institutional recognition despite resource constraints. Interview responses reinforce this interpretation, with one respondent stating that "Consistency is very important in branding. We ensure that our university logo, colors, programs, and achievements are continuously communicated across all online platforms" (P7), while another added that "Frequent online engagement keeps the institution relevant in the minds of students and parents during the selection period" (P14). The convergence suggests that brand salience is strengthened not merely by visibility, but by sustained and coherent exposure that enhances differentiation in a competitive higher education environment.

The third item reveals that 48.3% of respondents agreed that high website traffic reflects institutional popularity and influenced their interest (M = 3.53, SD = 0.96). Although this reflects a generally positive perception, the relatively lower mean suggests that website traffic is a less salient indicator compared to more direct forms of digital visibility such as social media exposure and search engine results. This observation partly supports Minh and Mai (2024), who emphasize the strategic role of institutional websites in shaping brand salience and admission decisions. However, the present findings suggest that in the Kenyan context, website influence is largely indirect. Interview data clarifies this interpretation, as respondents indicated that students primarily use websites for verification rather than evaluating traffic metrics. One respondent explained, "Most students visit the university website to verify programs, fees structures, admission requirements, and rankings before making final decisions" (P5). This suggests that students prioritize informational credibility and content quality over quantitative indicators of popularity, reinforcing the idea that website effectiveness depends on functional utility rather than perceived traffic.

A stronger pattern emerges in the fourth item, where 61.8% of respondents agreed that frequent appearance in online searches influenced their choice of university (M = 3.72, SD = 0.83), with relatively low dispersion indicating convergence of opinion. This finding strongly aligns with Kubetzek (2022), who argues that brand salience reflects ease of recall and accessibility during decision-making situations. It also supports Minh and Mai (2024), who found that visibility across digital channels significantly shapes institutional selection. Interview data reinforces this result, with one respondent noting that "Appearing among the top search results increases the likelihood that students will explore the institution further" (P18). The convergence indicates that search engine visibility functions as a critical gateway in the decision-making process, ensuring that institutions are included in students' consideration sets and enhancing discoverability at the point of need.

The fifth item shows that 59.8% of respondents agreed that the university brand is well represented online (M = 3.74, SD = 0.94), indicating a generally positive perception of institutional digital coherence. This suggests that respondents perceive universities as maintaining structured and consistent online identities across platforms. This finding corresponds with Rizard et al. (2023), who established that brand equity dimensions, including brand salience, significantly influence institutional reputation and student choice. Interview responses further support this interpretation, with one respondent stating that "We deliberately maintain active branding campaigns because visibility creates familiarity, and familiarity creates confidence among prospective students and parents" (P9), while another noted that "Students tend to associate strong online presence with quality, stability, and institutional credibility" (P20). The convergence suggests that coherent digital representation strengthens institutional legitimacy and enhances trust, both of which are central to enrollment decisions.

The final statement recorded the highest level of agreement, with 64.5% of respondents indicating that visibility attracts more students (M = 3.88, SD = 0.95). This suggests that visibility is the most influential dimension of brand salience in the study. This result is consistent with Yiadom et al. (2025), who found that brand salience significantly influences enrollment decisions in higher education institutions, and with Mwaura and Mang'ana (2023), who established a positive relationship between brand salience and market outcomes in the telecommunications sector. Interview data strongly corroborates this finding, with respondents reporting increased inquiries and applications following visibility campaigns. One participant stated that "Whenever our online campaigns increase, we normally record more inquiries, website visits, and applications from prospective students" (P1), while another noted that "Visibility widens the university's reach beyond its geographical region and exposes the institution to a larger student population" (P16). The convergence confirms that visibility is not only perceptual but also behaviorally consequential, directly influencing application volumes and institutional reach.

The findings demonstrate strong convergence between quantitative and qualitative evidence, confirming that brand salience, particularly digital visibility, significantly shapes students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. Across both datasets, four key mechanisms are evident: awareness creation through social media exposure, differentiation through consistent branding, verification through institutional websites, and discoverability through search engine visibility. However, interview data further reveals contextual constraints, including limited funding, technological infrastructure challenges, and staffing shortages (P12, P21), which affect universities' ability to sustain strong digital branding strategies. This indicates that while brand salience is a critical determinant of enrollment decisions, its effectiveness is moderated by institutional capacity differences within the Kenyan public university system.

The findings strongly align with Kubetzek's (2022) conceptualization of brand salience as ease of recall and consideration in decision-making. They also corroborate empirical evidence from Minh and Mai (2024), Yiadom et al. (2025), and Rizard et al. (2023), all of which emphasize the importance of visibility, consistency, and digital communication in shaping institutional choice. However, within the Kenyan higher education context, these effects operate within a structurally constrained environment shaped by government placement systems, institutional disparities, and resource limitations, suggesting that brand salience functions as a moderated rather than absolute determinant of enrollment decisions..

Students' Enrollment Decision

The dependent variable given by student's enrollment decision was evaluated using both 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.

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.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the linear relationships among the study variable; Brand Salience (BS). 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 Salience (BS)	Pearson Correlation	1	.687**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	296	296
	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.

Specifically, Brand Salience (BS) shows a strong positive relationship. This suggests that higher awareness and recognition of an institution's brand are strongly linked to favorable perceptions and increased likelihood of student enrollment.

Multiple Linear Regression

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

Table 4.11: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.824a	.680	.675	.36329	.680	154.263	4	291	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Salience									
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 Salience						

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 Salience, 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

Here is your regression table formatted in a standard academic style (APA/thesis format):

Table. Regression Analysis of Brand Salience on Students' Enrollment Decision

Model	**Predictor**	**Unstandardized Coefficient (B)**	**Std. Error**	**Standardized Coefficient (Beta)**	**t**	**Sig. (p)**
1	Constant	0.337	0.141	—	2.383	0.018
	Brand Salience	0.110	0.055	0.110	2.015	0.045

The regression model can be expressed as:

Students' Enrollment Decision = 0.337 + 0.110(BS) + 0.189(BR) + 0.352(BRE) + 0.259(BI).

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 Salience (B = 0.110, p = 0.045) has the weakest but still statistically significant effect. This suggests that while awareness and visibility of the institution's brand are important, their direct influence on enrollment decisions is relatively limited compared to other dimensions. It implies that being known is necessary, but not sufficient on its own to strongly drive enrollment choices.

Hypotheses Testing

H_01: There is no statistically significant relationship between brand salience and students' enrollment decision in Public Universities in Kenya

The first hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between brand salience and students' enrollment decision in public universities in Kenya. The regression results indicate that brand salience has a positive and statistically significant effect on students' enrollment decisions, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (B = 0.110, p = 0.045). This implies that institutional awareness and visibility play a meaningful role in shaping students' choices, although the effect is relatively weak compared to other dimensions of brand equity. In practical terms, this suggests that while students are more likely to consider universities they can easily recognize or recall, awareness alone does not strongly determine final enrollment decisions, as deeper evaluative and experiential factors tend to exert greater influence.

These findings are consistent with Kubetzek (2022), who conceptualizes brand salience as the ease with which a brand is remembered and recognized, emphasizing its role in building initial awareness within the decision-making process. Similarly, Minh and Mai (2024) established that brand salience significantly influences student admission choices by enhancing institutional visibility through digital and promotional platforms. In addition, Rizard et al. (2023) found that brand salience contributes positively to university reputation and student intention to choose an institution, reinforcing its relevance in shaping early-stage consideration sets. Yiadom et al. (2025) further support this position by demonstrating that institutional brand salience significantly affects student decisions, highlighting its role in differentiating universities in competitive environments. Nyamwaya and Muchunku (2021) also observed that branding and visibility efforts contribute to improved brand recall and recognition, although their effectiveness is influenced by institutional and external constraints. Collectively, these studies concur that brand salience plays an important role in awareness creation and initial consideration of institutions.

However, contrasting perspectives are also evident in the literature. Sabri and Nazri (2023) found that brand salience does not significantly influence decision-making, suggesting that awareness alone may not translate into actual behavioral intention when stronger evaluative factors such as perceived quality are present. This contradiction highlights that the effect of brand salience may be context-dependent and less influential in decisions that involve higher stakes or long-term commitments. The divergence in findings may be attributed to differences in context, as most prior studies were conducted in consumer markets or private higher education settings, unlike the public university context in Kenya, which is shaped by government placement systems, resource disparities, and institutional reputation hierarchies.

From the researcher's perspective, the findings of this study confirm that brand salience is an important but foundational determinant of students' enrollment decisions. It operates primarily at the awareness and consideration stage, ensuring that universities are visible and recognizable to prospective students. However, its limited effect size suggests that it functions more as an entry-level influence rather than a decisive factor in final selection.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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.

Relationship between brand salience and students' enrollment decision

The findings indicate that brand salience, particularly through digital visibility, plays an important role in shaping students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. Respondents generally acknowledged that social media platforms significantly influence their initial consideration of universities, suggesting that these platforms serve as the primary entry point for institutional awareness among prospective students. Consistent online presence was also found to be important in helping universities stand out from competitors, indicating that sustained visibility enhances institutional recognition and recall in the minds of potential applicants.

In addition, respondents noted that frequent appearance in online search results contributes to increased interest in a university, highlighting the importance of search engine visibility in the student decision-making process. A coherent and well-structured online institutional presence was also perceived to positively influence enrollment considerations, reinforcing the importance of maintaining a consistent brand identity across digital platforms. Overall, visibility was widely perceived as a key driver of attracting students, although website traffic as a technical indicator was less influential in shaping perceptions. These findings collectively show that brand salience primarily functions as an awareness-building mechanism that introduces and positions universities within the consideration set of prospective students. From the inferential analysis, it is established that brand salience has a statistically significant relationship with students' enrollment decisions ($B = 0.110$, $p = 0.045$)., although its effect is relatively weaker compared to other brand equity dimensions. This confirms that while awareness and visibility are important, they do not independently exert a strong decisive influence on students' final enrollment choices.

Conclusions

In the first objective, the study concludes that brand salience has a statistically significant but foundational influence on students' enrollment decisions in public universities in Kenya. Its primary role is to generate initial awareness, visibility, and mental availability of institutions within a highly competitive higher education environment. However, its effect is largely entry-level rather than decisive, as it mainly determines whether a university enters the student's consideration set rather than whether it is ultimately selected. Final enrollment decisions are more strongly shaped by deeper evaluative constructs such as institutional credibility, perceived quality, reputation, and experiential attributes. Thus, brand salience functions as a necessary but insufficient condition in the student decision-making process.

Recommendations

From the first objective's conclusion, the public universities should enhance brand salience by investing in sustained and strategically coordinated digital visibility initiatives. This includes strengthening social media engagement, optimizing search engine performance, and maintaining consistent and coherent branding across all online platforms. However, these efforts should not be implemented in isolation. They must be integrated with broader institutional strategies aimed at improving academic quality, student experience, and institutional reputation. Visibility alone is insufficient to drive enrollment decisions; therefore, universities should adopt a balanced branding strategy that combines awareness creation with strong value-based propositions to attract and retain prospective students.

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.

REFERENCES

1. Afrin, S. (2020). Effective Branding and Choice of University: A Thematic Analysis of Bangladeshi Private University Students. AIUB Journal of Business and Economics, 17(1), 67-90.
2. Alemu, S. (2022). The Effect Of Brand Equity Upon Customers'service Choices: The Case Of Bank Of Abyssinia Sc In Addis Ababa (Doctoral Dissertation, St. Mary's University).
3. Alfred, B. E. T. T. (2020). The Moderating Effect of Information Systems Capabilities on the Relationship between Information Systems Resources and Performance of Firms in the Telecommunications Industry in Kenya.
4. Almeida, P., & Santos, J. (2023). Digital alumni engagement analytics in higher education. Journal of Institutional Research, 48(2), 134-152. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jir.2023.02.005
5. Baker, T. L., et al. (2023). "Alumni Giving and Brand Attachment in Higher Education." Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 33(1), 45-67.
6. Belanger, C., Bali, S., & Longden, B. (2022). Transparency and accountability in higher education: The role of branding in public universities. Routledge.
7. Bonareri, A., Nkabu, C., & Huka, G. (2022). Brand equity and customer citizenship behavior among students of selected universities within Mount Kenya region. African Journal of Science, Technology and Social Sciences, 1(1).
8. Chapleo, C., & Clark, P. (2021). Brand attachment in higher education: The role of reputation and emotional engagement. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, *31*(2), 245-260. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2021.1927284
9. Chapleo, C., & Clark, P. (2021). Branding Universities: Trends, Strategies, and Challenges. Routledge.
10. Chen, L., Stiber, M., & Johnson, R. (2023). Cultural dimensions of university brand equity. International Journal of Educational Development, 97, 102743. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ijed.2023.102743
11. Coombs, W. T. (2019). Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
12. de Heer, F., & Tandoh-Offin, P. (2015). Exploring the Benefits of Branding Universities: A Developing Country Perspective. IUP Journal of Brand Management, 12(4).
13. Dholakia, R. R., & Acciardo, L. A. (2022). "Digital Branding in Universities: The Role of Social Media." Higher Education Policy, 35(2), 210-229.
14. Dholakia, R., & Acciardo, L. (2023). Strategic branding in public universities: Balancing tradition and digital innovation. Higher Education Policy, *36*(1), 78-95. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-022-00287-9
15. Do, T. T. H., & Ralev, V. (2021). Swedish university brand personality and student choice: How does the university brand personality influence international students when selecting a higher education institution? Case study: Jönköping University.
16. FakhrEldin, H. (2023). The effect of brand equity on students' choice to study in a private university. A study across private universities in Egypt. Submitted by: Karim Ashmawy Under Supervision of (Doctoral dissertation, The British University in Egypt).
17. Garcia, D. E. (2016). A study on the effect of higher education branding on student's college decision. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.
18. Garcia-Lopez, M., Martinez-Ortega, R., & Kim, S. (2023). Immersive learning ecosystems in higher education. Computers & Education, 196, 104701. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/cae.2023.104701
19. Ghorbanzadeh, D., Rahehagh, A., & Najarzadeh, M. (2024). Determinants of university brand loyalty in an emerging higher education market. Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education, 16(5), 2075-2090.

20. Hemsley-Brown, J., Melewar, T. C., & Nguyen, B. (2020). Exploring brand identity, reputation, and student decision-making in higher education. Studies in Higher Education, *45*(8), 1541-1558. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1593350
21. Hemsley-Brown, J., Melewar, T. C., Nguyen, B., & Wilson, E. J. (2020). "Exploring brand identity, meaning, and reputation in higher education." Journal of Business Waiganjo, E. (2021)., 109, 228-240.
22. Husain, R., Paul, J., & Koles, B. (2022). The role of brand experience, brand resonance and brand trust in luxury consumption. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 66, 102895.
23. Joseph, A., Mullen, E., & Spake, D. (2021). The influence of university branding on student choice: A cross-national study. Journal of Educational Marketing, *15*(3), 321-337. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEM-02-2021-0043
24. Kennedy, N. G. R., Martin, O., Zachary, A. B., & Reginah, K. (2022). The Moderating effect Of organizational environment on strategy implementation and performance of Kenya owned State Corporations relationship. African Journal of Business and Management (AJBUMA), 7(1), 150-171.
25. Khoa, B. T., & Nguyen, H. M. (2023). Brand experience in Asian higher education. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 33(1), 45-67. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jmhe.2023.01.003
26. Khoshtaria, T., Datuashvili, D., & Matin, A. (2023). A hierarchical model of university brand equity. Studies in Higher Education, 48(7), 1256-1274. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/sih.2023.07.008
27. Kubetzek, P. (2022). The Impact of Brand Activism on Brand Equity Among Generation Z Consumers (Master's thesis, Universidade Catolica Portuguesa (Portugal)).
28. Kuriakose, V., & Mathew, S. (2023). Two-factor theory in higher education branding. Higher Education Policy, 36(3), 421-439. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/hep.2023.03.005
29. Le Na, T. H., Dinh, T. H., & Ha, T. T. (2025). The influence of university brand equity on student satisfaction and engagement: Evidence from Vietnam. International Review of Management and Marketing, 15(2), 45–54. https://econjournals.com/index.php/irmm/article/view/18121
30. Le, H. T. N., & Nguyễn, Đ. N. S. (2022). The impact of university brand image on students’ loyalty: A study of non state universities in Ho Chi Minh City. Science & Technology Development Journal: Economics-Law & Management, 6(2), 2701-2715.
31. Marginson, S. (2023). "Global University Rankings and the Reputation Race." Studies in Higher Education, 48(4), 789-805.
32. Minh, D. P., & Mai, C. V. (2024). The Impact of Brand Awareness on Higher Education Institution Revenues: A Case Study of Vietnamese Universities. Salud, Ciencia y Tecnología-Serie de Conferencias, (3), 1037.
33. Minh, D. P., & Mai, C. V. (2024). The Impact of Brand Awareness on Higher Education Institution Revenues: A Case Study of Vietnamese Universities. Salud, Ciencia y Tecnología-Serie de Conferencias, (3), 1037.
34. Moywaywa, A. B., Nkaabu, C., & Huka, G. (2024). Brand Loyalty and Customer Citizenship Behavior Among Students of Selected Universities Within Mount Kenya Region. Journal of Marketing and Communication, 4(4), 1-12.
35. Mutua, F., & Mwikya, J. (2022). Brand Loyalty and Brand Name Awareness on Consumer Decision Making Process on Airtel Kenya Mobile Money Transfer.
36. Mwaura, P., & Mang'ana, R. (2023). Influence of brand awareness on growth of market share of Airtel Kenya. International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research, 11(1), 246-256. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7774255
37. Mwirigi, F. M., & Kaberia, M. K. (2019). Determinants influencing students’ choice of university: A case of public universities in Kenya. International Journal of Education and Research, 7(2), 145–160. https://www.ijern.com/
38. Ndung’u, C. G. (2023). The role of customer-based brand equity practices on institutional rating of selected private universities in Kenya (Unpublished study). Commission for University Education, Kenya.
39. Nguyen, T., et al. (2023). "Prospective Student Decision-Making: The Role of Institutional Branding." Journal of Higher Education, 94(3), 321-34.