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PRIVATE HEI'S CHARACTERISTICS AND MARKETING IMPACT ON STUDENTS' ENROLLMENT DECISIONS

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Abstract

The primary objectives of this analysis are divided into two, first is to determine the relationship between PHEI's Characteristics which are academic programs, tuition fees, reputation, location, employment opportunities, external factors which are electronic word of mouth (EWOM) and word of mouth (WOM) as independent variables towards students' decision-making as the dependent variable to enrol at a private HEI in Malaysia. Secondly is to find out the significant factor influencing students' decision to register at private HEI. The Theory of Reason and Action (TRA) was the guiding theory used in this study for EWOM and WOM, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was used for the characteristics of private HEI, such as academic programs, tuition fees, reputation, location, and employment opportunities. A quantitative and stratified sampling method were applied in this research. Four hundred and fifty (450) questionnaires were distributed on a recommended sample for undergraduate students from 6 selected private HEIs with university status in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. IBM SPPS (version 23) was used to analyze the data to test the hypotheses. After deleting the outlier, only 409 cases were held for research in this research. The researcher's conclusions resulted in a significant influence of academic programs, tuition fees, reputation, location, employment opportunities, and EWOM towards students' decision-making to enrol in a private HEI. Thus, all hypotheses proposed are significant. This paper addresses an interesting issue related to the factors of Private HEIs' characteristics and marketing channel influence students' decision-making to enrol.

Keywords: EWOM, Employment Opportunities, Decision Making, Reputation, Private Higher Education İnstitution

1. Introduction

The Malaysia Education System's vision is to elevate the country's educational framework above that of other ASEAN countries' higher education providers by targeting an increasing enrolment of 867,000 students in private HEIs by 2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia [MOE], 2013). This objective will be a success for the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) if accomplished. However, it challenges private HEIs to understand their role in meeting government standards while ensuring the institution's long-term viability (Nazidin et al., 2019). Malaysian Education System aspires to expand students' enrolment access to higher education by 2025, as Datuk Dr Parmjit Singh, President of the Malaysian Association of private Colleges and Universities, pointed out in the Malaysian Reserve Report (TMR). It will take at least five to six years for an educational institution to recover from pandemic situation (Yunus, 2020).

It poses a dilemma for Malaysia Education System: whether they could achieve the 2025 blueprint objective at the right time and could private HEIs ensure that the enrolment rate set by the Malaysia Education system is achieved by 2025. Various empirical studies researched determining the factors of different HEIs that influence students' decisions around Peninsular Malaysia (Buang et al., 2016; Husain et al., 2018; Ishak, 2016; Moorthy et al., 2019; Yaacob et al., 2020). However, the limitations of the previous study were narrowed to researching one selected HEI (Shamsudin, Ali, Ali, et al., 2019), which focused on University Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) first-semester students as their respondents; Yusuf et al. (2017) selected University Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) students solely as their respondent; while Harahap et al. (2017) focused on one state which is Perak. Thus, this study is carried out to tackle the limitation by researching a few private HEIs (universities) and will focus on areas around Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Students decision-making

Deciding to attend a particular university is a significant choice that only occurs once or twice in a person's life but has lasting implications (D'Uggento et al., 2023). Whether decisions are being made intentionally or for personal reasons, the decision-making process is adjusted to match those goals, and how we make decisions is important (Meyer, 2018). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) assert that students make their decisions about attending HEI through a decision-making process. Many other factors commonly play a role in the effects on student decisions. After students have been satisfied with the evaluation of existing items that meet their needs, the decision-making process begins. As Hidayat et al. (2018) mentioned in their research, the decision of students on whether to enrol is a vital factor for private HEIs, and they need to evaluate the findings to see where exactly they stand in students' decision-making process.

2.2. Academic programs

Prospective students' decisions to enrol in academic programmes offered by institutions are heavily influenced by the scope and adaptability of those programmes (Mishra & Gupta, 2021). As

reported by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) (2018), diploma programs have a duration of expected two years or 2.5 years of study (90 credit hours) and bachelor's degree programs are estimated to be completed within three years (120 credit hours) or four years of full-time study. Taking into consideration various academic programs offered in different private HEIs may vary in terms of their period of study, and this can somehow influence students' decision in deciding upon which private HEIs they shall select because some students may seek to complete their studies in a certain period that may seem to fall in favour of the particular HEI that offers a shorter duration of study compared to the other (Endsley, 2020). However, an empirical survey by Shamsudin, Ali, Saidun, et al. (2019) has concluded that academic programs are not related to students' decisions in selecting universities by selecting first-year semester undergraduate students as their sample.

2.3. Tuition fees

The primary determinants for students seeking higher education, according to Callender and Melis (2022), are the tuition fees and financial commitments. The tuition fees are a major consideration for prospective students when choosing a university, and most of them take this into account before choosing a HEI (Mishra & Gupta, 2021). Tuition fees define charges such as those payable in exchange for purchasing goods or services (Anyi, 2017). Regarding to this study, it is well-defined as the charges that HEIs impose on students in exchange for using the services. However, students look at different perspectives when selecting HEIs (Sá, 2019) rather than just looking at the concept of service in exchange for money. The fees are measured based on the worthiness of the teaching, quality of education and reasonability of paying the money. More students are leaving college because they can't afford the costs (Sarkodie et al., 2020).

2.4. Reputation

Reputation, also known as corporate reputation, is defined in business terms as the overall appeal of a company or feedback obtained from its constituencies that concerns the company's reliability and credibility compared to its competitors (Pires & Trez, 2018). Research by Shamsudin, Ali, Saidun, et al. (2019) indicated that reputation was fourth in influencing students' decisions. For private HEIs, their heritage-related offerings, maintaining standards, and competition need to be distinguished from other HEIs in the industry (Nguyen et al., 2019). The Ministry of Education in Malaysia has established two ranking systems that measure the performance and position of the university in the market according to its offerings or characteristics. The first ranking system is SETARA that evaluates institutes on four bases, (1) general reputation, (2) teaching, (3) research, and lastly, (4) income generation (Serena, 2020), whereas the second-ranking system, MyQuest, mainly used to assess private universities on the bases of their (1) quality, (2) management system and (3) graduate recognition (Sin, 2022).

2.5. Location

Location can be a consideration for private HEIs to separate themselves from their competitors, influencing students' decisions (Kayombo et al., 2020). Compared to other institutions, the uniqueness of

an institute located area reflects the institute as a differentiator. This links to the brand's awareness (Winter & Thompson-Whiteside, 2017). In addition, when the university is not only close to the center of the city or the center of the prefecture, but also located in an area with well-developed transportation infrastructure, its assets are more valuable there (Le, 2020). Location is the most consistent element influencing students' choice of a university that assures security, whether they enrol close to home or distant in a place that meets their comfort and accessibility, according to Yusuf et al. (2017). However, these findings are the exact opposite of the conclusion made in the study of Ilgan et al. (2018), which found that students need to significantly place familiarity with an environment as the main factor that will influence their decision to enrol.

2.6. Employment opportunities

Employment opportunities also come along in the internship students might be interested in, which creates a means for most private HEIs to collaborate with big companies to place their students in their companies as interns. Offering future career options to students alongside their interesting programs can create awareness among the student on the various options and job fields available (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Students must be informed about occupations connected to their studies for them to get ready before joining the workforce (Noor et al., 2022). In addition to that, if the private HEI offers a job in companies which are well known, then this factor is most likely to influence students' decision indirectly in selecting that private HEI. Research from Sundarrajh and Zulkfili (2019) mentioned that private HEI needs to keep in mind that students are interested in the outcomes. Hence, their action on graduates shall result in excellent products to make students feel like their offer is not merely an offer but that they do what they promise to deliver. Shamsudin, Ali, Saidun, et al. (2019) found that employment opportunities are among the most reliable factors influencing students' decisions in selecting a university compared to academic programs, tuition fees, and location.

2.7. Electronic word of mouth (EWOM)

EWOM plays an essential part in the process specifically. The findings of Sessa (2017) highlighted that EWOM is related to students' decisions during the choice phase, which is a phase where students must list out a few universities and then search for further and in-detail information about the universities. Another study in Sarawak was carried out to investigate if students are influenced by EWOM mainly via social media networking sites, Suki et al. (2016) highlighted that 46.6 per cent of students or graduates seek opinions on the internet, whereas 99.2 per cent point out their opinion on private HEIs on social networking sites. Meanwhile, Adam and Gunarto (2021) revealed social media has an impact on private university choice in Palembang City, Indonesia. Such results have also been concluded in an empirical study by Jorgensen and Ha (2019) in the United States of America.

2.8. Word of mouth (WOM)

WOM is informal or face-to-face discussion between social groupings such as family, friends, peers, and teachers (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). The message can be received or delivered in the form of a

positive or the opposite way which will directly or indirectly influence an individual's decision on how they perceive the product or service now, especially when the message is received from close members or social groups (Adefulu et al., 2020). In deciding which university to attend, word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations are more reliable than marketing (Lee et al., 2020). By linking WOM to consumer behaviour, it can be perceived that the positive WOM increases the consumer's probability of selecting the product, while the negative WOM reverses the positive WOM. These findings (Adam & Gunarto, 2021; Harahap et al., 2017; Lin, 2020) conclude that WOM positively and significantly impacts students' decisions.

2.9. Hypothesis developments

i. H1: Academic programs have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enrol in a private HEI.

ii. H2: Tuition fees have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enrol in a private HEI.

iii. H3: Reputation has a significant relationship on a student's decision to enrol in a private HEI.

iv. H4: Location has a significant relationship on a student's decision to enrol in a private HEI.

v. H5: Employment opportunities have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enrol in a private HEI.

vi. H6: EWOM have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enrol in a private HEI.

vii. H7: WOM have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enrol in a private HEI.

2.10. Theoritical framework

The Theory of Reason and Action (TRA) was the guiding theory for EWOM and WOM, demonstrating how well it can be applied to universal consumer information technologies (Lai, 2017). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), however, fit for academic programs, tuition fees, reputation, location, and employment opportunities, it is employed to comprehend, foresee, and simulate human behaviour in various contexts (Ajzen, 1991). These two theories were applied because subjective norms of TRA can be displayed in EWOM and WOM. If students' decision is influenced by the opinions or importance of society in performing the behaviours - if an individual perceived their evaluated behaviour to be positive and another opinion seemed favourable, then the likelihood for individuals to perform the behaviour is high. Besides that, this also links to the third construct in the TPB model that aims at the characteristics of private HEI; (1) academic programs, (2) tuition fees, (3) reputation, (4) employment opportunities, and (5) location which are used to comprehend, foresee, and motivate students' behaviour in various scenarios.

Perceived behavioural control is linked to motivation in the response to success or achievement of success in terms of one positive or negative aspect of viewing their behaviour in a different situation. Eventually, when a student perceives a sense of confidence in the preferred HEI, it will make them feel in control of the situation and likely to increase their motivation to perform the behaviour. This explains that when an individual recognizes that they have the necessary resources and possibilities, it will increase their confidence and eventually consider themselves in control of the situation and gradually increase

their behavioural control. Tow summarised in the concept of Bandura's self-efficacy (Lee & Kim, 2017) that the expected behaviours of individuals are more likely to be impacted by confidence in their ability to perform a series of acts which is also seemed to be a recent concept of perceived control behaviour. In addition, one's faith in performing a behaviour successfully can result from a motivation process motivation is described as one's perception of the current goal compared to the goals state (Chan et al., 2020).

Figure 1 illustrates the factors that influence students' decisions (dependent variables) from the aspect of private HEIs' characteristics and external factors (independent variables). Based on the review and analyses of the past academic papers as mentioned in literature review part, the scope and adaptability of the educational programmes provided by the institution are key factors in potential students' decision to enrol (Mishra & Gupta, 2021); more students are quitting from university due to cost concerns (Sarkodie et al., 2020); private HEIs' heritage-related offerings, maintaining standards, and competition need to be distinguished from other HEIs in the education industry (Nguyen et al., 2019; Yusuf et al.,2017) concluded location is the most reliable factor that influences students' decision to select university that ensure security if they choose to enrol near home or away in a city which fits their convenience and accessibility; Shamsudin, Ali, Wahid, et al. (2019) discovered that one of the most reliable elements influencing students' decision to choose a university is career chances; Sessa (2017) highlighted EWOM is related to conclusion of students during the choice phase; research by Le et al. (2020) mentioned WOM communication is a crucial consideration for prospective students when selecting a university. In conjunction with these arguments put forward in this study, this research focused on these seven independent variables. The following conceptual framework is adapted from (Krishnan & Sajilan, 2014; Rudhumbu et al., 2017; Shamsudin, Ali, Wahid, et al., 2019).
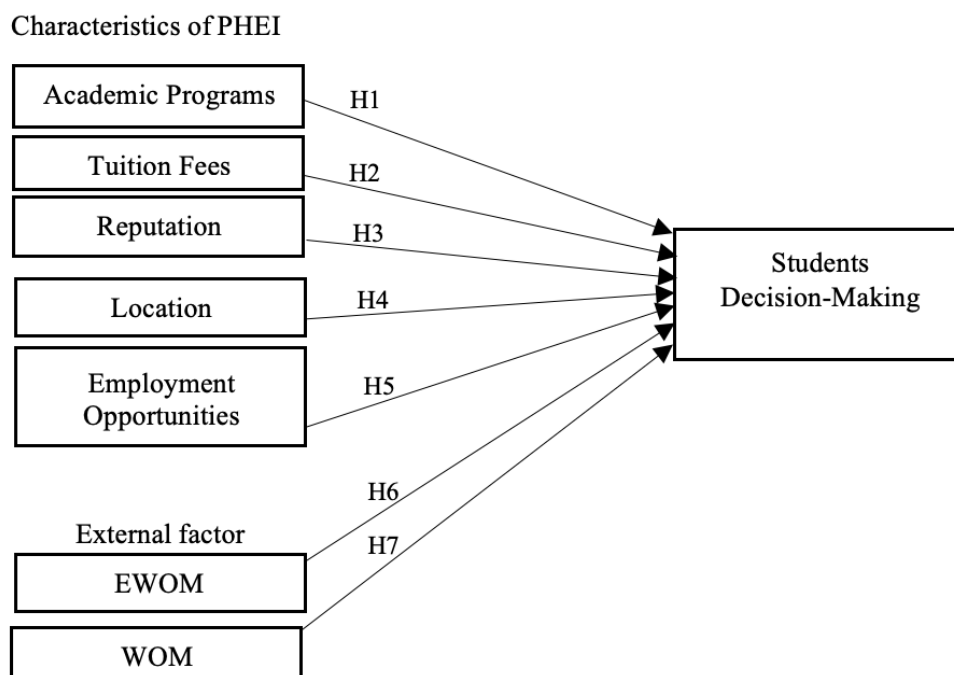
Figure 1. The conceptual framework

3. Research Methodology

For this research, the explanatory design was reasonable as it seeks to define variables influencing the students' decision to enrol in a university. This quantitative research was a cross-sectional study involving the observation and analysis of the data from the targeted population. The targeted demographic of this study is Malaysian undergraduate students at six selected of private HEIs based on Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Asian ranking around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, which will be used to identify the influence of HEIs' characteristics on students' decisions and the impact of external factors during the decision-making process. Kuala Lumpur and Selangor were chosen as the sampling location for this study because these two states have the highest number of universities. This study used stratified sampling to determine the required sample size from 6 selected universities. Stratified sampling is a common form of sampling that researchers use when attempting to conclude various strata. The strata in the population data are established based on certain common characteristics. According to Etikan and Bala (2017), this sampling technique ensures that the analysis obtains a representative heterogeneous sample from the population of interest. The total number of undergraduate students in the selected universities is approximately 54,324 students. In accordance with Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the recommended sample size is 381 to 382 for a population of between 50,000 and 75,000. Therefore, the study distributed 450 questionnaires using stratified sampling to fulfil recommended sample size. The measurement item for independent variable namely (i) academic programs offered adapted from (Mulyono et al., 2020; Rachmadhani et al., 2018; Yaacob et al., 2020); (ii) tuition fees adapted from (Sessa, 2017; Shamsudin, Ali, Wahid, et al., 2019); (iii) reputation of Private HEIs adapted from (Buang et al., 2016; Rachmadhani et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2018); (iv) location of the Private HEIs area adapted from (Arifin et al., 2020; Buang et al., 2016; Sessa, 2017; Yaacob et al., 2020); (v) employment opportunities adapted from (Adom, 2015; Ishak, 2016; Shamsudin, Ali, Ali, et al., 2019; Yaacob et al., 2020); (vi) electronic word of mouth (EWOM) adapted from (Chakraborty, 2019; Ishak, 2016; Koay et al., 2020; Sessa, 2017); (vii) word of mouth (WOM) adapted from Ishak (2016), Sessa (2017) and Lin (2020). Meanwhile, the measurement item for the dependent variable which is students' decision adapted from Hidayat et al. (2018); and Shamsudin, Ali, Saidun, et al. (2019). Once the questionnaire is distributed and received, it proceeds to analyze using a statistical software program, Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) analysis version 23.

4. Data analysis and Result

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents (n=450). Using the data gathered, it was analyzed that most respondents are females (58%). On the other hand, most of these respondents were Chinese (42.2%), Indian (29.3%), followed by others (14.4%) and Malay students (14.2%). Following that, the majority of the study's responses receives were bachelor's degree students (71.6%), whereas diploma students were 28.9% out of the total.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency ($n = 450$)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	261	58
	Male	193	42.9
Race	Malay	64	14.2
	Chinese	190	42.2
	Indian	132	29.3
	Others	65	14.4
Study program	Diploma	130	28.9
	Bachelor's Degree	322	71.6

According to Wijaya (2020), data screening is crucial in the early stages of research to detect any possible outliers. This study introduced a multivariate outlier detection approach based on Mahalanobis distance. It is primarily used to analyse two or more independent and dependent variables (Filzmoser & Gregorich, 2020). After evaluating the Mahalanobis distance value, the chi-square distribution was 76.09 (P = 0.001), which will be used to classify outliers. As a result, the Mahalanobis distance was found to range between 0.812 and 167.058 in this study. The chi-square statistical test detected 41 cases with a value greater than 76.09, which were then removed and only 409 points were held for further analysis in this study.

Nawi et al. (2020) claim that, reliability analysis for Cronbach alpha value test range below (0.5) is considered unacceptable, a Cronbach alpha value range of between 0.6 and 0.5 is seen to be a poor internal consistency, while a range of 0.6 and 0.7 is deemed to be questionable or moderate consistency; a range of Cronbach alpha between 0.7 and 0.8 implies acceptable reliability consistency; Cronbach alpha between 0.8 and 0.9 indicates excellent reliability; lastly, the range of Cronbach alpha between 0.9 and above suggests excellent reliability. Table 2 demonstrates the Cronbach's alpha value of this study that compromises all variables, which all recorded a value above 0.80, offering excellent reliability.

Table 2. Results of factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha value for all variables

Code	Item	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Academic Programs			
AP1	The type of courses offered	0.817	
AP2	Availability of my interested major	0.775	
AP3	The average number of years needed for completion	0.687	0.832
AP4	Quality of academic programs offered	0.830	
AP5	The uniqueness of the majors/programs offered	0.766	
Tuition Fees			
TF1	Cost of tuition fees charged	0.772	
TF2	Tuition fees are lower compared to other universities	0.862	
TF3	University provide scholarship that meets all the requirements	0.729	0.876
TF4	My guardians can afford the fees	0.843	
TF5	The price paid for studying is reasonable	0.873	

Code	Item	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Reputation			
R1	The reputation of the university is good	0.866	
R2	National/international ranking of university	0.866	
R3	The prestige of the university	0.892	0.924
R4	The value of the certificate offered is recognized nationally and internationally	0.864	
R5	The quality of the university has a positive public perception	0.89	
Location			
L1	The city in which the university is located is familiar to me	0.813	
L2	Has access to or close to public transportation	0.729	
L3	Physical attractiveness of the campus (food stalls, stationeries stores, malls)	0.736	0.820
L4	University's campus is near my home	0.75	
L5	The located area is convenient for my everyday travel	0.806	
Employment Opportunities			
EO1	International recognition of quality graduates and a higher rate of employability	0.858	
EO2	Assurance of employability after graduation	0.864	
EO3	Availability of industrial training (internship) in the final year	0.809	0.892
EO4	University has collaborated with companies that have a positive image	0.798	
EO5	Easiness of previous students to find jobs after graduation	0.851	
Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)			
EWOM1	Advertisements/news I receive or see online about the university	0.807	
EWOM2	Reviews or information I receive about the specific university are believable	0.866	
EWOM3	Reviews or information I receive online facilitate me to determine the university better	0.853	0.898
EWOM4	I intend to seek more reviews or information about the university on social platforms or other internet platforms	0.808	
EWOM5	Online reviews or comments on blogs, social media platforms and the official website of HEIs	0.875	
Word of Mouth (WOM)			
WOM1	In-person conversations with family, friends, and close members	0.778	
WOM2	Recommendations from family, friends, and teachers	0.815	
WOM3	My friend(s)' 's decision of which university to enrol	0.706	0.832
WOM4	Information I receive during the open day(s)	0.789	
WOM5	Recommendations from graduates of the university	0.810	
Students' Decision			
SD1	Academic programs offered by the university are within my interest	0.785	
SD2	The cost of tuition fees charged is affordable and reasonable for me, and guidance to pay	0.726	
SD3	The reputation of the university is good	0.826	0.888
SD4	I am familiar with the area of the university located	0.701	
SD5	Employment opportunities at the university are higher compared to other universities	0.814	
SD6	The information and reviews I received online.	0.789	

Multiple regression analysis finds the linear relationship between one dependent variable (outcome) and independent variables (explanatory variables). To demonstrate how well the model of the seven independent variables applies to the outcome variable, i.e. the students' decision-making, it is essential to use the goodness of fit statistic, which essentially examines the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable (Daoud, 2017). Consequently, the p-value can be used to determine the degree of leverage or relationship between variables; if the obtained p-value is lower than 0.05, it implies a positive relationship; if the p-value is more significant than 0.05, it indicates a negative relationship between variables. The proposed hypotheses (H1–H7) in Table 3 were examined in this analysis. The seven independent variables explain (0.789) 78.9% of the variance in students' decisions, according to the coefficient of determination (R-square). Based on this, the adjusted R square is 0.785, accounting for 78.5 per cent of the variation in students' decisions. The Durbin-Watsons value shall be close to 2 to show no autocorrelation problem of error terms (Kumari & Yadav, 2018). Meanwhile, the F-value of 214.442 indicates a regression effect between the independent and dependent variables. Overall, the results obtained in Table 4 all of the independent variables; academic programs (β = .101; p = .003 < .05), tuition fees (β = .254; p = .000 < .05), reputation (β =.186; p = .000 < .05), location (β =.123; p = .000 < .05), employment opportunities (β =.097; p = .020 < .05), EWOM (β =.187; p = .000 < .05), and WOM (β =.146; p = .000 <.05) was strongly and positively linked to students' decision to enrol in a private HEI. As a result, in this analysis, all hypotheses proposed were proven to be significant, as shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Results of multiple regression analysis

Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
Model	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)		-.253	.801
(H1) Academic programs	.101	2.970	.003
(H2) Tuition fees	.254	8.914	.000
(H3) Reputation	.186	4.682	.000
1 (H4) Location	.123	3.701	.000
(H5) Employment opportunities	.097	2.335	.020
(H6) EWOM	.187	4.431	.000
(H7) WOM	.146	3.932	.000

Note: $R^2 = 0.789$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.785$; F = 214.442; sig F = .000; **$p < .05$; Durbin Watson = 1.944

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing

	Hypotheses	Results
H1	Academic programs have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enroll in a private HEI.	Significant
H2	Tuition fees have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enroll in a private HEI.	Significant
H3	Reputation has a significant relationship on a student's decision to enroll in a private HEI.	Significant
H4	Location has a significant relationship on a student's decision to enroll in a private HEI.	Significant
H5	Employment opportunities have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enroll in a private HEI.	Significant

H6	EWOM have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enroll in a private HEI.	Significant
H7	WOM have a significant relationship on a student's decision to enroll in a private HEI.	Significant

According to the results of a direct effect on students' decision-making to enrol, students were drawn to the private HEI because of the availability of relevant majors or courses. Aside from that, the number of years required to complete the program greatly affects students' decision to enrol. This was supported by the previous research of Endsley (2020), According to Alhawiti and Abdelhamid (2017), a variety of criteria, including the subject of study, the course, the period, and intakes, influence the decision of which academic programme to enrol in a HEI. Therefore, students would consider those factors critically before making a private HEI enrolment decision. Second, students favourably view the influence of the tuition fees on their decision to enrol. When deciding to enrol in a private HEI, students consider not only whether the cost of the study is worthwhile and whether the price charged is affordable for the parents or guardians. It appears to be a positive factor for both students and parents if HEIs provide financial assistance to help them manage their expenses (Husain et al., 2018). As a result, it is well-accepted that a tuition fee perceived as valuable or beneficial would attract more students. Previous studies support this (Samani et al., 2017), which concluded that tuition fees are relevant and have a significant effect on students' decision to enrol in HEI. Third, the university's ranking is positively linked to its reputation. This is influenced by the assumption that students who graduate from a prestigious university have a better chance of finding work, or it may be some sort of guarantee that students will be able to find a well-paid job after graduation.

It is proven, based on the study of Husain et al. (2018) that ranking affects students' decisions. Fourth, it concluded that the students do place particular importance on the following components when it comes to the location of the HEIs. Students feel safe when they are around the familiar environment; hence, selecting an HEI near home or close to the city that they are friendly is one of the critical factors. Supported by (Kayombo et al., 2020; Mustafa et al., 2018; Yusuf et al., 2017), location is the most reliable factor affecting students' decision to attend a specific institution. Fifth, employment opportunities directly affect students' choice to enrol in a private HEI. However, this finding contradicts the analysis of previous research (Ishak, 2016; Shamsudin, Ali, Wahid, et al., 2019). As a result, this concludes that students may have changed their opinion toward the employment opportunities provided by private HEIs. Sixth, EWOM directly affects the students' decision-making to enrol in a private HEI. It concluded that students still have the same opinion regarding internet usage in determining and understanding their choice of private HEIs. That means when students are looking for a particular university to enrol in, they will look for additional information, news, and feedback from several social media sites that seem trustworthy, while also helping them better understand the university. According to Kayombo et al. (2020), students used a website and social networking to learn more about the university. Lastly, WOM is also deemed a factor affecting students' decision-making to enrol in a private HEI. The findings of this analysis can reflect that students place opinions of society or families significant for them in the decision-making to enrol (Haron et al., 2017). This analysis is supported by prior research by (Harahap et al., 2017;

Haron et al., 2017; Lin, 2020), in the sense of Malaysian education, have indicated that supportive WOM or the effects of close relatives have a significant impact on student's decisions to enrol.

5. Conclusion

Finally, this study looked at the factors that impact students' decisions to enrol in private HEIs in Malaysia. The importance of tuition fees in affecting students' decisions to enrol in private HEIs was demonstrated in this study and further recommendations to administrators of private HEIs in terms of increasing the factor of private HEIs' characteristics for students, which did not appear to be the most influential as compared to tuition fees. By recognizing the direct relationship between fixed aspects of private HEIs, EWOM and WOM as external factors, this study used the TRA and TPB models to support these factors and theoretically added to the existing literature and theory growth. Finally, it is anticipated that the findings of this study will assist private HEIs in the future in luring students.

There were several limitations of the study identified throughout the research. Firstly, this study was primarily focused on local students from private HEIs with university status only. Remember, this study was only conducted from the perspective of students, not from the standpoint of HEIs. Considering the limitations, this study offers suggestions for future studies. To begin, this study suggests involving international students and getting the perspective of international students' reasons in choosing Malaysia as a study location, referring to similar factors as this study research. It is also suggested for private HEIs include college university or college status as a sample. Besides that, future studies should also look at a similar context from the viewpoint of higher education institutions.

Acknowledgments

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