

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROMOTION, AFFORDABILITY OF TUITION, AND ENROLLMENT PROCESS SIMPLICITY ON STUDENT ADMISSION DECISIONS IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A CASE STUDY AT UNIVERSITAS LANCANG KUNING

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Abstract: Competition among private universities in Indonesia, particularly in Riau Province, has intensified as institutions seek effective strategies to attract prospective students. Most prior studies emphasized the 7P marketing mix, leaving a gap in understanding the specific influence of promotion, tuition affordability, and enrollment process simplicity. This study addresses the gap by examining these three factors in student enrollment decisions at Universitas Lancang Kuning. A quantitative explanatory design was applied, with data from 160 new students analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that all variables significantly influence enrollment decisions, with process simplicity ($\beta = 0.341$, $p < 0.05$) and promotion ($\beta = 0.304$, $p < 0.05$) having stronger effects than tuition affordability ($\beta = 0.192$, $p < 0.05$). The model explains 51.8% of variance ($R^2 = 0.518$) and has strong predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.354$). These findings suggest that in the digital era, simplified enrollment systems and effective digital promotion are more decisive than tuition costs. The study enriches higher education marketing literature and offers practical insights for private universities to strengthen digital promotion, improve tuition flexibility, and streamline procedures to enhance competitiveness.

Keywords: Promotion, Tuition Fees, Registration Process, Student Decision

1. Introduction

Competition among private universities (PTS) in Indonesia, especially in Riau Province, is becoming increasingly fierce as the number of educational institutions offering various study programs increases. In such conditions, universities are required to develop effective strategies to attract prospective students. The three main factors that students often consider when choosing a university are promotion, tuition fees, and the registration process. Recent research shows that effective digital promotion strategies can increase the number of new student applicants to universities (Kamila, Maulana, & Solihati, 2025). Targeted, technology-based digital promotion allows universities to reach prospective students more widely and efficiently. Apart from promotion, the affordability of tuition fees is one of the most important aspects in choosing a private university. Putri's (2025) study confirms that tuition fees rank second after the quality of study programs as a consideration for prospective students. This shows that private universities that are able to offer competitive tuition fees have a greater chance of attracting public interest. Meanwhile, the simplicity of the registration process is also no less important. Research by Zainul and Shaddiq (2023) proves that promotion and tuition fees have a significant effect on the decision to choose a university, while the efficiency of digital-based registration services also enhances the experience of prospective students. With a simple, fast, and transparent online registration system, universities can strengthen their positive image and encourage prospective students to make a final decision. However, in practice, the appeal of private universities often declines due to three main problems. First, ineffective promotion

hinders campuses from optimally reaching prospective students. Research by Kamila, Maulana, and Solihati (2025) confirms that weak promotional strategies make it difficult for universities to compete. Second, tuition fees that are considered expensive are a major obstacle, as shown in a study by Baruno and Ady (2024), which found that the perception of high costs has a significant effect on the decline in prospective students' interest. Third, a complicated registration process has negative implications for the institution's attractiveness. The results of research by Prianugraha and Danial (2024) confirm that universities that fail to simplify their registration procedures risk losing potential prospective students. In academic studies, most previous research in the field of higher education marketing has focused on the 7Ps of marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, Physical Evidence). Sanjaya, Kasyfan, and Bawono (2024), for example, analyzed the 7P factors in students' decision-making in choosing a digital business study program at UPI Tasikmalaya and found that the combination of all marketing mix elements influenced the attractiveness of the campus. However, research that specifically highlights the three most crucial variables of promotion, tuition fees, and the registration process is still limited. The study by Panditawati and Hidayat (2024) emphasizes that private vocational education strategies are greatly influenced by promotion and cost as dominant factors, while Nurhasanah and Rahayu (2024) assert that marketing mix innovations that emphasize promotion and process aspects are crucial to the effectiveness of education marketing strategies. Thus, there is a research gap in the literature, which has examined the marketing mix more comprehensively, but not many have specifically tested the influence of the effectiveness of promotion, affordability of tuition fees, and simplicity of the registration process on student decisions in the digital era. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on a case study at Lancang Kuning University. The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of promotional effectiveness, tuition affordability, and simplicity of the registration process on student admission decisions. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the extent to which digital promotion influences prospective students' interest (Kamila, Maulana, & Solihati, 2025), analyze the role of tuition affordability in influencing the decision to choose a private university (Baruno & Ady, 2024), and assess the impact of the simplicity of the digital-based registration process on the attractiveness of the institution (Prianugraha & Danial, 2024). By focusing on these three key factors, this study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of PTS marketing strategies, particularly at Lancang Kuning University.

2. Literature Review

Higher Education Service Marketing Theory

Higher education service marketing is the application of marketing principles in the context of educational services, where students are positioned as the primary consumers. This theory emphasizes the importance of a marketing mix strategy (7Ps: product, price, place, promotion, people, process, physical evidence) that is adapted to attract, retain, and satisfy students. In the Indonesian context, Adrianto & Suharyanti's (2024) research presents a comprehensive theoretical review of higher education marketing and builds a conceptual framework. They assert that university brand image, promotional strategies, and service quality are the main determinants of higher education competitiveness. In addition, Juhaidi (2024) introduces the theory of social media marketing in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. This study emphasizes that social media functions as an effective marketing instrument in conveying promotional messages, enhancing institutional image, and influencing student decisions. From a local value perspective, Hawu & Ismanto (2024) emphasize the integration of Indonesian

cultural values in the marketing of educational services to strengthen institutional image. This adds a dimension of differentiation in higher education marketing amid global competition. Other theories also emphasize the role of service quality as the basis for marketing educational services. The i-HESQUAL model developed by Asnawi & Setyaningsih (2020) offers a framework for evaluating service quality in Indonesian Islamic universities, which can be used to assess student satisfaction and loyalty to the institution. Thus, the literature shows that higher education service marketing theory is developing towards the integration of traditional marketing mix, digital innovation (especially social media marketing), service quality, and local cultural values. However, a specific focus on promotion, tuition fees, and simplicity of the registration process as core variables is still rarely studied in depth.

The Concept of Promotion Effectiveness in Digital Higher Education

Promotion effectiveness in the context of digital higher education refers to the extent to which digital-based promotion strategies can influence the awareness, interest, and decisions of prospective students. This concept includes the use of social media, websites, digital advertising, and integrated communication strategies to reach target audiences efficiently. According to Demchenko, Zhuk, & Blynova (2024), effective digital promotion in higher education institutions depends on the selection of appropriate digital platforms and tools, such as social media, education portals, and email marketing campaigns. Success is measured by increased program visibility and growth in the number of applicants. Meanwhile, Cordero-Gutiérrez & Lahuerta-Otero (2020) emphasize that the effectiveness of digital advertising in higher education can be measured through social media efficiency ratios, such as click-through rate (CTR), conversion rate, and user interaction. This provides an objective measure of the extent to which digital campaigns influence prospective students. On the other hand, Prasad (2020) asserts that the effectiveness of digital promotion in private universities is closely related to the student enrollment ratio. In other words, the measure of effectiveness is not only in terms of ad exposure but also in the outcome of conversion to actual enrollment. This concept is further reinforced by Yoganandham (2024), who evaluated digital marketing strategies in higher education. The results show that consistent, data analytics-based digital promotion is more effective in reaching prospective student segments than traditional promotion. Thus, the effectiveness of promotion in digital higher education encompasses not only audience reach but also engagement, conversion, and its contribution to the institution's image and competitiveness.

The Theory of Tuition Affordability and Its Impact on Access to Education

The theory of tuition affordability emphasizes that excessively high higher education costs can be a major barrier to access for students from lower-middle-class backgrounds. Affordability is not only a matter of the nominal cost of tuition, but also the ratio of costs to household economic capacity, the availability of financial aid, and institutional policies. According to Kaufman & Phan (2025), high tuition costs are directly related to limited access to higher education. Their study shows that heavy financial burdens reduce participation rates and have the potential to widen social gaps. In addition, Ehrmann & Kinzie (2023) emphasize the close relationship between quality, access, and affordability. Their book proposes a practical framework for keeping higher education inclusive by controlling tuition costs while improving service quality. In an international context, affordability is also linked to social justice. The study by Dong & Wan (2012) highlights how education loan and subsidy programs in China can expand access for high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds, thereby functioning as a mechanism for equalizing opportunities. Thus, the theory of tuition

affordability asserts that reasonable costs, supported by financial assistance, will increase accessibility, reduce social inequality, and strengthen the role of higher education as a means of social mobility.

The Concept of Simplicity in Service Process

Simplicity in the service process is one of the important factors in service quality theory and customer satisfaction. In the context of higher education, simplicity means administrative processes that are easy to understand, fast, and have minimal obstacles, thereby improving the experience of students as service users. According to Petrusch & Vaccaro (2019), students greatly appreciate ease, simplicity, and convenience in accessing educational services. The lean service principle, which emphasizes flow and standardization, has been proven to increase student satisfaction by minimizing process complexity. Furthermore, Pedro, Mendes, & Lourenço (2018) found that perceived service quality is closely related to student satisfaction. Simplicity in educational service methods, including administrative processes, improves perceived quality and leads to higher satisfaction. Meanwhile, Galeeva (2016) adapted the SERVQUAL model for higher education in Russia, and the results showed that the dimensions of reliability and responsiveness, which are closely related to process simplicity, are the main determinants of perceived service quality. Thus, the literature confirms that simplicity in service processes is an integral part of service quality dimensions. Simple, easy, and efficient processes increase student comfort, reinforce positive perceptions of service quality, and ultimately result in higher satisfaction levels. Based on the theoretical review, the research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H1: Promotion has a positive effect on student admission decisions.

This is in line with the research by Baruno & Ady (2024), which shows that digital promotion and word of mouth strategies play an important role in influencing students' decisions to choose a university.

H2: The affordability of tuition fees has a positive effect on student admission decisions. Research by Fortunata & Toni (2020) found that affordable tuition fees, when balanced with service quality, increase students' interest in continuing their studies.

H3: The simplicity of the registration process has a positive effect on student admission decisions. A study by Ho & Law (2022) confirms that an easy and efficient application process is one of the important factors in students' decisions to choose a university, especially in the digital era.

Research Model

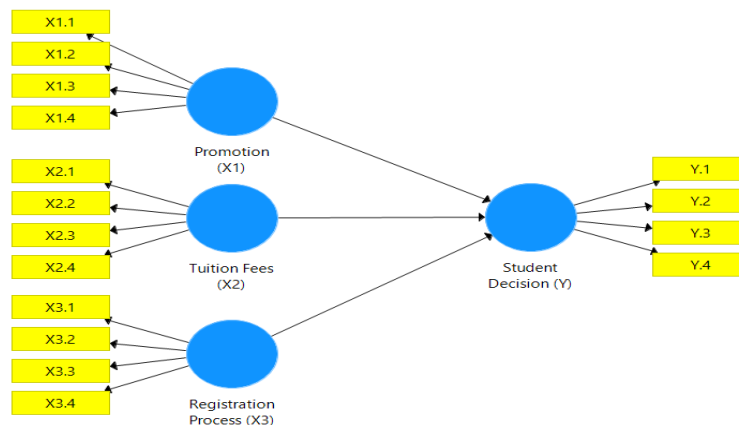


Figure 1: Research Model
 Sources: smartpls

3. Method

Research Approach

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. The quantitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on measuring numerical data, analyzing relationships between variables, and testing hypotheses statistically. The explanatory research design was used because the main objective of this study was to examine the causal relationship between the variables of promotion, affordability of tuition fees, simplicity of the registration process, and student admission decisions at Lancang Kuning University. The use of explanatory research in the context of higher education is in line with the research by Sumartik et al. (2023), which applied explanatory research to analyze the factors that influence the performance of higher education businesses through knowledge sharing. In addition, Cantwell (2020) emphasizes the importance of explanatory accounts in international and comparative higher education research, particularly to understand the cause-and-effect relationships between variables. Thus, the explanatory research design in this study is considered appropriate to provide a comprehensive empirical description of the influence of promotion, tuition fees, and the registration process on students' decisions in choosing a university.

Population and Sample

The population of this study is new students at Lancang Kuning University for the 2024/2025 academic year. Since this study uses Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis, the sample size is determined based on the guidelines provided by Hair et al. (2019). Hair and colleagues suggest that the sample size in PLS-SEM should be determined based on the number of indicators in the research instrument, which is between 5 and 10 times the number of indicators. In this study, there are 16 indicators (Promotion = 4, Tuition Fees = 4, Registration Process = 4, Student Decisions = 4). Thus, the recommended sample size is 80–160 respondents. To improve the reliability of the model and the validity of the research results, the sample size used was set at the upper limit, namely 160 new students at Lancang Kuning University for the 2024/2025 academic year. This number is considered sufficient to produce stable parameter estimates in PLS-SEM.

Data Collection Techniques

Data in this study were collected using questionnaires compiled based on indicators for each research variable (promotion, affordability of tuition fees, simplicity of the registration process, and student decisions). This research instrument used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), to measure respondents' perceptions of each statement. The use of the Likert scale is widely recognized in higher education research because it provides a quantitative estimate of student perceptions. The study by Dauzón-Ledesma & Izquierdo (2023) confirms the validity and reliability of Likert-based questionnaires in evaluating language learning investments in higher education. Meanwhile, Kusmaryono et al. (2022) in their literature review show that the Likert scale has advantages in measuring educational and social variables with good reliability when used with 5–7 response categories. In addition, Tanujaya & Prahmana (2022) also discuss the challenges in using the Likert scale in social research, such as the potential for respondent bias, but still emphasize its advantages as the most practical and proven instrument for measuring perceptions. Thus, the use of a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire in this study is considered appropriate and valid for exploring the perceptions of new students at Lancang Kuning University regarding promotion, tuition fees, the registration process, and student admission decisions.

Research Variables

1. Promotion (X1)

Promotion in the context of higher education refers to the efforts of institutions to introduce and market study programs to prospective students through various media, both conventional and digital. Commonly used indicators include promotion intensity, message relevance, use of digital media, and advertising appeal. Baruno & Ady (2024) show that digital promotion and word of mouth have a significant effect on students' decisions to choose private universities.

2. Tuition Fees (X2)

Tuition fees reflect affordability and the suitability of the price paid in relation to the quality of educational services received by students. Indicators: affordability of costs, payment flexibility, clarity of cost information, and cost suitability with facilities. Fortunata & Toni (2020) found that affordable tuition fees encourage students to continue their postgraduate studies at Universitas Prima Indonesia.

3. Registration Process (X3)

The registration process is a series of administrative procedures that prospective students must complete to enter a university. The simplicity of this process affects the comfort and interest of applicants. Indicators: ease of procedure, speed of service, transparency of information, and accessibility of the online system. Ho & Law (2022) emphasize that clear and efficient application procedures are one of the important factors in higher education marketing strategies.

4. Student Decision (Y)

Student decisions are the final result of considerations of various factors that lead students to choose a particular university. Indicators: suitability to needs, confidence in choosing a campus, recommendations from others, and commitment to continuing studies at that campus. Zainul & Shaddiq (2023) prove that promotion and tuition fees have a significant effect on students' decisions to choose a university.

Table 1. Table of Variable Operationalization

Variable	Indicator	Measurement Scale	Source
Promotion (X1)	- Promotion intensity - Relevance of promotional messages - Use of digital media (social media/website) - Advertisement appeal	Likert 1–5	Baruno & Ady, 2024
Tuition Fees (X2)	- Affordability of tuition fees - Payment flexibility - Clarity of fee information - Appropriateness of fees relative to facilities	Likert 1–5	Fortunata & Toni, 2020
Registration Process (X3)	- Ease of procedures - Speed of service - Transparency of registration information - Accessibility of the online system	Likert 1–5	Ho & Law, 2022
Student Decision (Y)	- Alignment with needs - Confidence in choosing the campus - Recommendations from others - Commitment to continuing studies	Likert 1–5	Zainul & Shaddiq, 2023

Sources: Baruno & Ady, 2024, Fortunata & Toni, 2020, Ho & Law, 2022, Zainul & Shaddiq, 2023

Data Analysis Tools

This study uses SmartPLS 3 as the main software for data analysis. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach was chosen because it is suitable for

research models with latent variables, multiple indicators, and a relatively limited number of samples.

1. Outer Model (Measurement Model)

The outer model was used to test construct validity and reliability. The tests conducted included: Convergent Validity through outer loading values (>0.70) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE >0.50). Discriminant Validity through the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio. Reliability through Cronbach's Alpha values (>0.70) and Composite Reliability (>0.70). Subhaktiyasa's (2024) study provides practical guidance on using SmartPLS for testing outer models in educational research.

2. Inner Model (Structural Model)

The inner model is used to evaluate the relationship between latent variables in the study. The analysis includes: Path Coefficient to see the direction and strength of the relationship between variables. R^2 (Coefficient of Determination) to assess the explanatory power of the model. f^2 (Effect Size) to measure the contribution of each construct to the model. Q^2 (Predictive Relevance) to test the predictive ability of the model. SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) to assess goodness of fit. Bootstrapping to test the statistical significance of each path with 5,000 subsamples. Research by Nawi et al. (2022) confirms the importance of evaluating the inner model using SmartPLS to see the influence of mediating variables and structural relationships.

3. Reasons for Choosing SmartPLS

SmartPLS was chosen because it can handle complex models, non-normal data, and relatively small sample sizes. A review by Ghasemy et al. (2020) also shows that PLS-SEM based on SmartPLS has been widely applied in higher education research.

4. Results and Discussion

Outer Model

The outer model in this study aims to test the quality of the instrument through three main aspects, namely convergent validity, construct reliability, and discriminant validity. The test results are as follows.

1. Convergent Validity and Reliability Test

Convergent validity is determined based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value, which is recommended to be at least 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 2 shows that all research constructs, namely Promotion, Tuition Fees, Process, and Student Decisions, have an AVE value above 0.60. This confirms that each indicator can adequately explain the variance of the latent construct. Meanwhile, construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). All constructs obtained Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.80 and CR above 0.85. Thus, this research instrument has proven to have high reliability and good internal consistency in measuring latent constructs.

Table 2. Results of Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability Tests

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Promotion (X1)	0,827	0,833	0,885	0,658
Tuition Fees (X2)	0,800	0,810	0,869	0,624
Registration Process (X3)	0,811	0,812	0,876	0,638
Student Decision (Y)	0,858	0,861	0,905	0,705

Source: Output SmartPLS (2025)

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that all constructs meet the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2019), namely, Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70, Composite Reliability > 0.70, and AVE > 0.50.

2. Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity aims to ensure that a construct is truly different from other constructs in the model. Two approaches commonly used to test discriminant validity are the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Cross Loadings (Hair et al., 2019).

a. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

The discriminant validity test using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion is conducted by comparing the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) square root value of each construct with the correlation between constructs. The criterion that must be met is that the AVE square root value (diagonal value) must be higher than the correlation between constructs in the same row and column.

Table 3. Results of the Discriminant Validity Test (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Variable	Promotion (X1)	Tuition Fees (X2)	Registration Process (X3)	Student Decision (Y)
Promotion (X1)	0,811			
Tuition Fees (X2)	0,585	0,790		
Registration Process (X3)	0,780	0,778	0,799	
Student Decision (Y)	0,729	0,659	0,784	0,840

Source: Output SmartPLS (2025)

The test results in Table 3 show that the diagonal values of each construct, namely Promotion (0.811), Tuition Fees (0.790), Process (0.799), and Student Decisions (0.840), are all higher than the correlation values with other constructs. For example, the Student Decision construct (0.840) is greater than its correlation with Promotion (0.729), Tuition Fees (0.659), and Process (0.784). Thus, all constructs in this study meet the criteria for discriminant validity according to Fornell and Larcker (1981).

b. Cross Loadings

In addition to using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, discriminant validity can also be evaluated through cross-loading values. The criterion used is that each indicator must have a higher loading value in its original construct than in other constructs.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Test Results (Cross Loadings)

Indicator	Promotion (X1)	Tuition Fees (X2)	Registration Process (X3)	Student Decision (Y)
X1.1	0,814	0,457	0,588	0,514
X1.2	0,852	0,316	0,489	0,483
X1.3	0,825	0,465	0,535	0,555
X1.4	0,751	0,320	0,456	0,435
X2.1	0,323	0,738	0,416	0,337
X2.2	0,388	0,819	0,455	0,426
X2.3	0,342	0,772	0,521	0,494
X2.4	0,472	0,827	0,580	0,469
X3.1	0,474	0,594	0,808	0,500
X3.2	0,468	0,546	0,772	0,524
X3.3	0,608	0,484	0,809	0,502
X3.4	0,499	0,403	0,805	0,567
Y1	0,471	0,501	0,610	0,877
Y2	0,536	0,459	0,590	0,874
Y3	0,520	0,424	0,536	0,858
Y4	0,542	0,478	0,642	0,742

Source: Output SmartPLS (2025)

From the cross-loadings table, it can be seen that all indicators have the highest loadings on their original constructs. For example, indicator X1.2 has a loading of 0.852 on the Promotion construct, higher than the loadings on Tuition Fees (0.316), Process (0.489), and Student Decisions (0.483). Similar findings were found in all other indicators, both in the Tuition Fees, Process, and Student Decisions constructs.

3. Interpretation of Outer Model Results

Overall, the outer model testing proves that this research instrument is valid and reliable. An AVE value > 0.50 indicates convergent validity, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability > 0.70 confirm construct reliability, and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion results confirm discriminant validity. With these results, it can be stated that this research measurement model is feasible to use, so that the analysis can proceed to the inner model stage to test the causal relationship between variables.

4. Collinearity Test (VIF)

Collinearity between indicators in the construct was tested using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value. According to Hair et al. (2019), an indicator is considered free from multicollinearity if the VIF value is below 5. Some researchers even recommend a stricter threshold of < 3.3 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006). Table 5 below presents the results of the collinearity test:

Table 5. Collinearity Test Results (VIF)

Indikator	VIF
X1.1	1,827
X1.2	2,180
X1.3	1,730
X1.4	1,637
X2.1	1,562
X2.2	1,863
X2.3	1,420
X2.4	1,787
X3.1	1,770
X3.2	1,588
X3.3	1,788
X3.4	1,698
Y1	2,437
Y2	2,537
Y3	2,391
Y4	1,484

Source: Output SmartPLS (2025)

The test results in Table 5 show that all indicators have VIF values between 1.420 and 2.537, which means they are still well below the maximum limit of 5. Thus, there is no indication of multicollinearity in this research instrument. Indicator Y2 has the highest VIF value (2.537), while indicator X2.3 has the lowest value (1.420). However, all of these values remain within the safe category. Therefore, it can be concluded that all indicators in the variables of Promotion, Tuition Fees, Process, and Student Decisions are free from collinearity issues, so the instrument is suitable for further analysis in the inner model.

Inner Model

The inner model is used to evaluate the structural relationships between latent constructs in the research model. Testing the inner model is done through three main stages, namely the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2).

1. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is used to measure the extent to which independent variables can explain dependent variables.

Table 6. R^2 Values

Dependent Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Student Decisions (Y)	0,518	0,509

Source: Output SmartPLS (2025)

The R^2 value for the Student Decision construct (Y) is 0.518 with an Adjusted R^2 of 0.509. According to Chin (1998), the criteria for R^2 are 0.67 (strong), 0.33 (moderate), and 0.19 (weak). Thus, the Promotion, Tuition Fees, and Process constructs can explain 51.8% of the variation in Student Decisions, which is classified as moderate. The remaining 48.2% is explained by other factors outside this research model.

2. Effect Size (f^2)

Effect size (f^2) is used to determine the relative contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable.

Table 7. Results of the f^2 Test

Independent Variable	Student Decisions (Y)
Promotion (X1)	0,111
Tuition Fees (X2)	0,045
Registration Process (X3)	0,110

Source: Output SmartPLS (2025)

Based on the table above, the variables of Promotion ($f^2 = 0.111$) and Process ($f^2 = 0.110$) contribute slightly to moderately to Student Decisions, while Tuition Fees ($f^2 = 0.045$) contribute slightly. This indicates that Promotion and Process have a relatively more dominant influence than Tuition Fees, although overall the three variables are still in the small to moderate category (Hair et al., 2019: 0.02 = small, 0.15 = moderate, 0.35 = large).

3. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Predictive relevance (Q^2) is used to assess the model's predictive ability for endogenous constructs using the blindfolding method.

Table 8. Q^2 Test Results (Cross-validated Redundancy)

Variable	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
Promotion (X1)	640,0	640,0	—
Tuition Fees (X2)	640,0	640,0	—
Registration Process (X3)	640,0	640,0	—
Student Decision (Y)	640,0	413,433	0,354

Source: Output SmartPLS (2025)

The Q^2 value for Student Decisions (Y) = 0.354, which is greater than 0. This indicates that the model has good predictive relevance. According to Hair et al. (2019), the Q^2 criteria are 0.02

(small), 0.15 (medium), and 0.35 (large). Thus, this research model has a large predictive ability for Student Decisions.

4. Inner Model Interpretation

Overall, the inner model test proves that the R^2 value of 0.518 indicates that the independent constructs (Promotion, Tuition Fees, and Process) are able to explain the variability of Student Decisions moderately. The f^2 test results show that Promotion and Process have a relatively greater influence than Tuition Fees, although all are still in the small-medium category. The Q^2 value of 0.354 confirms that the model has strong predictive power for Student Decisions. Thus, this research model has met the inner model feasibility criteria and can proceed to hypothesis testing in the next stage.

Hypothesis Testing (Path Coefficient)

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the significance of the independent variables' influence on the dependent variables through path coefficient values, T-statistics, and P-values. Based on the path coefficient test results using SmartPLS with 160 respondents, the results are shown in the hypothesis testing table. The t-table value at a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) with a degree of freedom ($df = n - k = 160 - 3 = 157$) is 1.97.

Table 9. Hypothesis Test Results (Path Coefficient)

Influence Path	Original Sample	T Hitung	T Tabel ($\alpha = 0,05$, $df = 157$)	Decision
X1 (Promotion) → Student Decision (Y)	0,304	4,070	1,97	Significant (H1 accepted)
X2 (Tuition Fees) → Student Decision (Y)	0,192	2,545	1,97	Significant (H2 accepted)
X3 (Process) → Student Decision (Y)	0,341	4,885	1,97	Significant (H3 accepted)

Source: Output SmartPLS (2025)

The test results show that:

Promotion (X1) → Student Decision (Y)

The path coefficient value is 0.304 with a t-value of 4.070 and a p-value of 0.000. Because the t-value is greater than the table t-value ($4.070 > 1.97$) and the p-value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted. This means that promotion has a positive and significant effect on student decisions.

Tuition Fees (X2) → Student Decision (Y)

The path coefficient value is 0.192 with a t-value of 2.545 and a p-value of 0.011. Because the t-value is greater than the table t-value ($2.545 > 1.97$) and the p-value is < 0.05 , the hypothesis is accepted. Thus, tuition fees have a positive and significant effect on student decisions.

Process (X3) → Student Decisions (Y)

The path coefficient value is 0.341 with a t-value of 4.885 and a p-value of 0.000. Because the t-value is greater than the t-table ($4.885 > 1.97$) and the p-value < 0.05 , the hypothesis is accepted. This means that the process has a positive and significant effect on student decisions.

Discussion

The results show that promotion, affordability of tuition fees, and simplicity of the registration process have a positive and significant effect on students' decisions to choose Lancang Kuning University. Promotion has a path coefficient of 0.304 ($t = 4.070$; $p < 0.05$), tuition fees of 0.192

($t = 2.545$; $p < 0.05$), and process of 0.341 ($t = 4.885$; $p < 0.05$). These three variables proved to be dominant factors in influencing new students' decisions, with process and promotion contributing more strongly than tuition fees. These findings are in line with higher education marketing theory, which emphasizes the role of the marketing mix (7Ps) in building the competitiveness of higher education institutions. Within this theoretical framework, promotion, price (cost), and process are crucial elements that directly shape consumer perceptions and decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Adrianto & Suharyanti, 2024). The research results support the concept of promotion effectiveness in digital higher education. Promotion based on social media, websites, and digital advertising has been proven to expand reach and increase interest among prospective students (Kamila, Maulana, & Solihati, 2025; Demchenko et al., 2024). At Unilak, a consistent digital marketing strategy has been proven to increase the institution's visibility, in line with the study by Baruno & Ady (2024), which confirms that effective digital promotion contributes significantly to student decisions. Findings regarding cost affordability support the tuition affordability theory, which states that reasonable tuition fees are an important requirement for accessibility to higher education (Kaufman & Phan, 2025). Although the influence of cost in this study is smaller than that of promotion and process, the results are consistent with studies by Putri (2025) and Fortunata & Toni (2020), which found that payment flexibility and cost transparency play a role in increasing student interest. The process variable shows the greatest influence, confirming the relevance of simplicity in service process theory, which emphasizes the importance of easy, fast, and efficient service procedures (Pedro, Mendes, & Lourenço, 2018). These results reinforce the findings of Ho & Law (2022), who stated that simplicity in registration increases students' positive perceptions. In the context of Unilak, the implementation of a more streamlined online registration system appears to be a strong differentiating factor compared to other private universities in Riau. Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the role of the marketing mix, but confirm that in the context of Unilak, the process and promotion factors are more dominant than cost. This indicates that in the digital era, service convenience and marketing communication effectiveness are more decisive for student decisions than mere affordability.

5. Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that tuition fees, promotions, and the registration process have a positive and significant effect on students' decisions to choose Lancang Kuning University, with the variables of process and promotion having a more dominant influence than cost. These findings have practical implications that the campus needs to expand its scholarship schemes and payment flexibility, optimize digital promotion through various online communication channels, and simplify technology-based registration procedures to make them faster and more efficient. From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the development of higher education marketing literature by providing SEM-PLS-based empirical evidence on the three key variables that influence student decisions. However, this study has limitations because it only focuses on one university and does not include other variables such as campus image, lecturer reputation, and career prospects. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the object to several private universities, add relevant variables, and use a multi-group analysis approach on SmartPLS to produce more comprehensive and generalizable findings.

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