
Effect of Advertisement Media on Students' Choice of Higher Learning Institutions: A Case of Saint Augustine University of Tanzania

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Abstract

This manuscript investigates how advertisement media influence students' choice of higher learning institutions using Saint Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) as the case. Guided by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the study examined the effect of radio advertising, poster advertising, and social media advertising on students' awareness, intention to apply, and final enrollment decisions. A quantitative cross-sectional design was adopted. Data were collected from 367 first-year undergraduate students through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS. Reliability analysis showed that the instrument was internally consistent, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.81 to 0.88 and an overall reliability of 0.85. Descriptive results showed that all three forms of advertising were positively perceived by respondents, with social media recording the highest overall mean score (4.02), followed by radio (3.96) and posters (3.96). Pearson correlation results showed positive and statistically significant associations between all three media and student choice. Multiple regression analysis indicated that the predictor variables jointly explained 58.4% of the variance in student choice ($R = 0.764$, $R^2 = 0.584$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.581$; $F = 132.985$; $p < 0.001$). Social media advertising exerted the strongest standardized effect ($\beta = 0.438$), followed by radio advertising ($\beta = 0.272$) and poster advertising ($\beta = 0.218$). The findings suggest that social media is currently the most influential medium because it combines rich information, interactivity, and peer influence, while radio remains valuable for broad awareness and rural outreach and posters reinforce institutional visibility in public spaces. The study concludes that universities in Tanzania should adopt an integrated marketing communication strategy that combines digital, traditional, and outdoor media to strengthen visibility, engagement, and enrollment outcomes.

Keywords: advertisement media, student choice, higher learning institutions, social media advertising, radio advertising, poster advertising, Tanzania

1. Introduction

In contemporary higher education environments, student recruitment increasingly depends on strategic communication. Universities no longer rely solely on academic reputation or word-of-

mouth referral; they also communicate deliberately through mass media, outdoor promotion, and digital platforms to reach prospective students. This development is especially important in contexts where institutions compete for visibility, trust, and enrollment in an expanding but resource-constrained education market.

Tanzania reflects this changing landscape. Public and private universities use several communication channels to promote programs, institutional identity, scholarships, application deadlines, and graduate prospects. Yet institutions do not always possess empirical evidence that shows which media channels are most influential and which combinations work best for different groups of prospective students. This manuscript responds to that gap by presenting a condensed article version of the dissertation on the effects of advertisement media on students' choice of higher learning institutions at SAUT.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The central problem was that although universities increasingly invest in advertising, there was insufficient localized evidence on how specific media channels influence actual student choice in Tanzania. Advertising is expected to create awareness, shape perceptions, reduce uncertainty, build confidence, and stimulate action. However, in practice, communication strategies may be fragmented, inconsistent, or weakly aligned with audience behavior. Institutions may therefore spend scarce resources without a clear understanding of which advertising media contribute most strongly to recruitment outcomes.

At SAUT, radio, posters, and social media were among the most visible communication channels used to reach prospective students. Each medium offered different strengths. Radio offered broad coverage and accessibility. Posters provided visibility in strategic public locations. Social media offered a dynamic space for information sharing, visual storytelling, and interaction. The study therefore asked whether these channels influence student choice differently and which of them carries the strongest effect.

1.2 Importance of the Problem

The problem was important at institutional, policy, and social levels. At the institutional level, student enrollment is a vital determinant of financial sustainability, program viability, and competitive positioning. Universities need evidence-based communication strategies so that they can direct budgets toward media that achieve awareness and conversion more efficiently.

At the policy level, effective and ethical higher education advertising matters because students require reliable information when making life-shaping decisions about where to study. Better evidence can support regulators and education authorities in designing guidance that promotes transparency, inclusion, and fair competition in university marketing. At the social level, communication equity matters because media access differs between urban and rural populations. A better understanding of media effects can help institutions reach students who might otherwise remain excluded from university opportunities.

1.3 Relevant Scholarship

The dissertation was anchored in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which explains persuasion through central and peripheral routes of information processing. Central processing occurs when individuals carefully evaluate message quality, relevance, and evidence. Peripheral processing occurs when attitudes are shaped by cues such as repetition, attractiveness, source credibility, music, visuals, popularity signals, or emotional tone. The theory is useful for university advertising because prospective students do not engage with all promotional messages in the same way.

Empirical scholarship reviewed in the dissertation showed that radio remains relevant in educational marketing because it is relatively affordable and can reach geographically dispersed audiences, including rural populations. Poster and billboard communication can improve brand visibility and message recall, particularly when placement is strategic and design quality is high. More recent studies increasingly identify social media as an especially influential tool because it combines information richness with interactivity, social endorsement, and rapid feedback. Even so, the literature reviewed in the dissertation identified a contextual knowledge gap: relatively few studies had examined radio, poster, and social media advertising together within a Tanzanian higher education institution.

1.4 Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design

The general objective of the study was to analyze the effects of advertising media on students' choice of higher learning institutions, with SAUT as the focal case. Specifically, the study aimed to determine the effect of radio advertising on prospective students' choice of SAUT, to examine the influence of poster advertising on students' enrollment decisions, and to assess the effect of social media advertising on prospective students' decisions to apply and enroll.

From the literature and theoretical framework, the study proceeded with the expectation that all three advertising media would positively influence student choice, but that the strength of their effects would differ. The quantitative cross-sectional design was suitable for this purpose because it enabled the study to measure students' reported exposure, perceptions, and decision outcomes using standardized items and then estimate both descriptive patterns and statistical relationships among variables.

2. Method

2.1. Participant Characteristics

The study focused on first-year undergraduate students because they had recently gone through the process of selecting and joining a higher learning institution. This made them appropriate respondents for reflecting on the advertising messages and channels that shaped their awareness and enrollment decisions. The final sample comprised 367 respondents.

The sample included 198 male respondents (54.0%) and 169 female respondents (46.0%). With respect to age, 173 respondents (47.1%) were aged 18–22 years, 134 (36.5%) were aged 23–27 years, 38 (10.4%) were aged 28–32 years, and 22 (6.0%) were aged 33 years and above. In terms of place of residence prior to joining SAUT, 218 respondents (59.4%) came from urban areas and 149 (40.6%) from rural areas. Academically, 129 respondents (35.1%) were in Business and Economics, 96 (26.2%) in Education, 72 (19.6%) in Law, 41 (11.2%) in Social Sciences, and 29 (7.9%) in Information Technology.

2.2 Sampling Procedures

The research was carried out at SAUT Mwanza main campus. Structured questionnaires were distributed to first-year undergraduate students available during the data collection period. The dissertation reports that 380 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 367 were properly completed and usable, while 13 were incomplete or otherwise unsuitable for final analysis. This yielded an effective response rate of 96.6%.

The strong response rate can be attributed to the researcher's direct involvement during data collection, the support of university staff, and the practical simplicity of the questionnaire. The achieved participation level enhanced the representativeness of the study and reduced the likelihood of serious non-response bias.

2.2.1 Sample Size, Power, and Precision

The usable sample of 367 respondents was adequate for the descriptive and multivariate analyses performed in the study. The manuscript template calls for explicit attention to sample size and precision; although the study was not an experiment requiring treatment-arm power calculations, the final sample exceeded commonly accepted minimum thresholds for social science survey research and provided a stable base for correlation and regression estimates. The high response rate also improved precision by minimizing data loss.

2.2.2 Measures and Covariates

The questionnaire contained five items each for radio advertising, poster advertising, social media advertising, and student choice. Radio advertising items covered awareness of SAUT programs, clarity of information, frequency of exposure, trust in information delivered through radio, and influence on application. Poster items assessed visibility in public areas, visual attractiveness, clarity of poster information, location visibility, and influence on enrollment. Social media items measured exposure to SAUT content across platforms, usefulness of online information, increased interest due to posts and testimonials, influence of peer reactions such as likes and shares, and direct effect on application and enrollment. Student choice items reflected awareness, intention to apply, confidence in choosing SAUT, enrollment, and recommendation intention.

Responses were recorded on Likert-type scales and combined into composite mean scores for analysis. Demographic variables were retained as descriptive covariates that helped contextualize

how exposure to different media might vary across respondent categories, especially residence and age.

2.2.3 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design. Participants were not assigned to manipulated conditions; they were surveyed about naturally occurring exposure to university advertising and about their subsequent choice behavior. This design was appropriate because the objective was explanatory and predictive rather than experimental. It allowed the researcher to estimate the association between media exposure and student choice at one point in time.

2.2.4 Experimental Manipulations or Interventions

No experimental manipulations or interventions were introduced. The subsection is retained because it appears in the manuscript template, but the study assessed existing advertising practices rather than researcher-controlled treatment conditions.

3. Results

The results are presented in line with the manuscript template. They include recruitment information, reliability diagnostics, descriptive findings, ancillary analyses, participant flow, baseline data, and regression results.

3.1 Recruitment

A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed and 367 usable questionnaires were returned. Thirteen questionnaires were incomplete or unusable and were excluded from analysis. The response rate of 96.6% was excellent and provided strong support for the validity of the dataset used in the study.

Table 1. Response rate of the questionnaires

Description	Number of Questionnaires	Percentage (%)
Distributed questionnaires	380	100.0
Returned and usable questionnaires	367	96.6
Unreturned/incomplete questionnaires	13	3.4

Note. The response rate exceeded the commonly recommended threshold for quantitative survey studies.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

The analysis began with descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of the instrument. Pearson's correlation analysis was then used to examine the direction and strength of relationships between advertising media and student choice.

Multiple linear regression was finally employed to determine the extent to which the three advertising media jointly and individually predicted student choice.

Table 2. Reliability statistics for the study variables

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Radio Advertising	5	0.84	Good Reliability
Poster Advertising	5	0.81	Good Reliability
Social Media Advertising	5	0.88	Excellent Reliability
Student Choice	5	0.86	Good Reliability
Overall Reliability	20	0.85	Good Reliability

Note. All coefficients exceeded 0.70, confirming satisfactory internal consistency.

3.3 Ancillary Analyses

Beyond the primary regression model, the study examined bivariate correlations and multicollinearity diagnostics. The correlations showed that all three forms of advertising had positive and significant associations with student choice. The strongest bivariate relationship was between social media advertising and student choice ($r = 0.688$), followed by radio advertising ($r = 0.622$) and poster advertising ($r = 0.587$).

Table 3. Correlation matrix among study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Radio Advertising	1			
2. Poster Advertising	0.573**	1		
3. Social Media Advertising	0.614**	0.589**	1	
4. Student Choice	0.622**	0.587**	0.688**	1

Note. ** indicates significance at the 0.01 level.

Multicollinearity diagnostics further showed that the predictor variables were sufficiently distinct to be included in the same regression model. Tolerance values ranged from 0.594 to 0.661 and VIF values from 1.512 to 1.682, indicating no serious multicollinearity problem.

Table 4. Multicollinearity diagnostics

Independent Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Interpretation
Radio Advertising	0.640	1.563	No multicollinearity
Poster Advertising	0.661	1.512	No multicollinearity
Social Media Advertising	0.594	1.682	No multicollinearity

Note. The model satisfied the assumptions required to proceed with multiple regression.

3.4 Participant Flow

Because the study used a single cross-sectional survey, participant flow was uncomplicated. The initial pool consisted of 380 distributed questionnaires. Following screening for completeness, 367 questionnaires were retained for analysis. There were no experimental groups, treatment arms, or follow-up losses beyond questionnaire incompleteness.

3.5 Intervention or Manipulation Fidelity

The study did not involve an intervention in the experimental sense. Nonetheless, procedural fidelity was maintained through standardized administration of the questionnaire, uniform instructions to respondents, and consistent coding of responses. These measures supported data quality and comparability across respondents.

3.6 Baseline Data

The demographic profile of respondents provided an important contextual baseline for interpreting the results. The sample was broadly balanced by gender and included students from both urban and rural backgrounds. This diversity was especially relevant because access to media differs by geography and may shape how prospective students encounter university advertisements.

Table 5. Demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 367)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	198	54.0
Gender	Female	169	46.0
Age Group	18–22	173	47.1
Age Group	23–27	134	36.5
Age Group	28–32	38	10.4
Age Group	33 and above	22	6.0
Residence	Urban	218	59.4
Residence	Rural	149	40.6
Academic Program	Business and Economics	129	35.1
Academic Program	Education	96	26.2
Academic Program	Law / Social Sciences / IT	142	38.7

Note. The full dissertation reports separate values for Law (19.6%), Social Sciences (11.2%), and Information Technology (7.9%).

3.6.1 Statistics and Data Analysis

Analysis was performed on all complete and usable cases. Since the design did not involve assigned interventions, the intent-to-treat logic built into the generic template was not applicable. Instead, complete-case analysis was used. Composite means were interpreted alongside correlation coefficients, regression coefficients, and diagnostic statistics.

3.6.2 Adverse Events

No adverse events were identified. Participation involved completion of a questionnaire for academic purposes and was considered low risk. Confidentiality, voluntary participation, and use of data solely for research purposes were maintained throughout the study.

Descriptive analysis by objective showed that all three media positively influenced students' perceptions and decisions. Social media achieved the highest overall mean score, while radio and posters recorded equal overall means.

Table 6. Respondents' perceptions of radio advertising (n = 367)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
Radio advertisements helped me become aware of SAUT's academic programs.	4.01	0.96
Information provided through radio advertisements was clear and easy to understand.	3.99	0.94
The frequency of SAUT radio advertisements increased my awareness of the university.	3.99	0.89
I trust the information about SAUT delivered through radio advertising.	3.96	0.93
Radio advertising influenced my decision to apply to SAUT.	3.84	0.99
Overall Mean Score	3.96	0.94

Table 7. Respondents' perceptions of poster advertising (n = 367)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
I noticed posters or billboards about SAUT in public areas before joining the university.	4.04	0.94
The posters and billboards were visually attractive and captured my attention.	4.00	0.92
Information on SAUT posters was clear and useful.	3.92	0.97
The location of posters made them highly visible.	4.02	0.90
Poster advertising influenced my decision to enroll at SAUT.	3.82	0.97
Overall Mean Score	3.96	0.94

Table 8. Respondents’ perceptions of social media advertising (n = 367)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
I saw SAUT advertisements on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp.	4.13	0.86
Social media advertisements provided detailed and useful information about SAUT programs.	4.04	0.90
Posts, videos, and testimonials on social media increased my interest in SAUT.	4.07	0.88
I was influenced by likes, shares, and comments from others on SAUT’s social media pages.	3.92	0.95
Social media advertising influenced my decision to apply and enroll at SAUT.	3.96	0.91
Overall Mean Score	4.02	0.90

The descriptive pattern is important. Radio showed particular strength in awareness creation and message clarity. Poster advertising was strongest in visibility and visual attractiveness. Social media led across exposure, detail, and interest generation, indicating that it performed strongly across both awareness and persuasion dimensions.

Table 9. Regression model summary and coefficients

Model / Predictor	R / B	R ² / Std. Err.	Beta (β)	F or t	Sig.
Model Summary	0.764	0.584 / 0.426	—	132.985	0.000
Adjusted R ²	—	0.581	—	—	—
Constant	0.527	0.102	—	5.167	0.000
Radio Advertising	0.241	0.049	0.272	4.918	0.000
Poster Advertising	0.196	0.046	0.218	4.261	0.000
Social Media Advertising	0.403	0.048	0.438	8.396	0.000

Note. ANOVA for the model produced F = 132.985 with p < 0.001, confirming that the regression equation was statistically significant.

4. Discussion

The study confirms that advertisement media significantly influence students’ choice of higher learning institutions and that the magnitude of influence differs across channels. All three media produced positive effects, but social media emerged as the strongest predictor of student choice, followed by radio and then poster advertising. This pattern aligns well with both the Elaboration Likelihood Model and contemporary developments in higher education marketing.

Radio advertising maintained a meaningful place in the decision environment. Respondents agreed that radio advertisements made them aware of SAUT’s academic programs, delivered clear information, and built trust. The regression result for radio (β = 0.272) suggests that radio

continues to play a substantial role even in an era of digital communication. Its practical importance is likely connected to broad reach, affordability, and accessibility, especially in settings where internet access is inconsistent. In the Tanzanian context, radio can therefore remain a useful awareness-building medium, particularly for rural and peri-urban audiences.

Poster advertising also showed a statistically significant effect ($\beta = 0.218$). The descriptive results reveal that posters were particularly effective in visibility, attention capture, and public recall. This is consistent with the nature of outdoor media: posters and billboards work by occupying physical space in ways that remind, signal, and reinforce institutional presence. However, the poster effect was smaller than that of radio and social media. This suggests that posters may be better suited to reinforcing awareness than driving full conversion to enrollment unless they are combined with more information-rich channels.

The strongest result came from social media advertising ($\beta = 0.438$). This finding is theoretically meaningful because social media combines central and peripheral persuasion more effectively than the other media examined. Prospective students can encounter detailed information about programs, deadlines, fees, and scholarships while simultaneously experiencing peripheral cues such as visual appeal, testimonials, comments, and peer endorsement. Social media is therefore capable of doing more than generating awareness; it can influence attitude formation, emotional engagement, and the final decision to apply or enroll.

The combined explanatory power of the model was also notable. The three media variables together explained 58.4% of the variance in student choice, which indicates that communication and promotion are major determinants of recruitment outcomes. At the same time, the remaining unexplained portion of variance shows that student choice is multi-causal. Factors such as tuition affordability, academic quality, institutional reputation, family advice, peer influence, and location are also likely to contribute to enrollment decisions. The present results should therefore be interpreted as showing the substantial role of advertising within a broader decision ecology rather than as implying that communication alone determines enrollment.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results strongly support the use of the Elaboration Likelihood Model in higher education advertising research. Radio and social media each seem capable of activating both central and peripheral routes of persuasion. Radio can combine substantive information with repetition and source credibility. Social media can combine detailed information with interactivity, visibility metrics, and emotional engagement. Posters, by contrast, appear to rely more heavily on peripheral cues, although concise information on deadlines and programs may also stimulate limited central processing. The study therefore extends the practical use of ELM into the Tanzanian higher education setting by demonstrating how different media channels embody different persuasive mechanisms.

The findings also carry practical implications for university administrators and marketing managers. First, social media should be treated as a core recruitment medium rather than a supplementary communication tool. Institutions should maintain active pages, use student-centered content, publish clear application information, and integrate testimonials, videos, and

alumni stories. Second, radio should continue to be used strategically for broad-based outreach, especially where digital access is lower. Third, posters should be designed more carefully and placed in high-visibility areas such as schools, bus stands, and town centers, where they can reinforce recall and institutional presence.

An integrated marketing communication approach appears to be the strongest strategic implication of the study. Rather than choosing one channel at the expense of the others, institutions should align the strengths of each medium. Radio can create initial awareness, posters can maintain visibility and reinforce key messages, and social media can deepen engagement and support action. This complementary approach is more suitable for diverse Tanzanian audiences than a one-channel strategy.

The study had limitations. It relied on self-reported data from one institution and one cohort of students. That means the results may not be fully generalizable to all higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The cross-sectional design also limits strong causal claims. In addition, only three advertising media were examined, leaving out potentially relevant factors such as television, websites, direct outreach, school visits, family networks, and institutional ranking information. These limitations do not negate the findings, but they suggest caution and point to the value of future comparative and longitudinal research.

Overall, the evidence supports the conclusion that SAUT and similar institutions can improve recruitment outcomes by adopting evidence-based, multi-channel advertising strategies. In the present study, social media produced the strongest effect, but the continued positive role of radio and posters confirms that traditional and outdoor media remain relevant in Tanzania's mixed media environment.

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