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Examining the role of digital promotion, referral, and CRM in shaping decisions to enroll in RPL programs

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effects of digital promotion, referral, and customer relationship management (CRM) on study decisions in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program at Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Asia Malang. A quantitative approach was employed to analyze the partial and simultaneous effects of the independent variables on prospective students' decisions to choose the RPL program. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to respondents associated with the RPL program and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. The results indicate that digital promotion has a positive and significant effect on study decisions, suggesting that accessible digital information, engaging promotional content, and clear communication can strengthen prospective students' interest and confidence. Referral also has a positive and significant effect, indicating that recommendations from alumni, current students, family members, and colleagues can enhance trust in the RPL program. Furthermore, CRM has a positive and significant effect on study decisions, particularly through effective information services, prompt communication, consultation accessibility, and responsiveness to prospective students' needs. These findings highlight the importance of integrating digital promotion, referral strategies, and relationship-based services to strengthen enrollment decisions in RPL programs.

Keywords digital promotion; referral; customer relationship management; study decision; recognition of prior learning

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1. Introduction

Higher education in Indonesia has increasingly developed flexible and adaptive learning pathways to meet the needs of working adults and professionals. One of these pathways is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which allows learning outcomes acquired through formal, non-formal, informal education, and work experience to be recognized as a basis for continuing higher education (Raciti et al., 2024). In Indonesia, RPL is regulated by the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 41 of 2021 (Awinda & Prasetyo, 2025). RPL provides an opportunity for individuals to obtain academic recognition of prior competencies while reducing the need to repeat learning that has already been mastered. Therefore, RPL supports wider access to higher education and lifelong learning, particularly for individuals who need to balance education with professional activities (Alifa et al., 2024; Putra & Mahendra, 2025).

Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis ASIA Malang is one of the private higher education institutions offering an RPL pathway. In 2025, the institution recorded 152 RPL students, consisting of 108 students in Management and 44 students in Informatics Engineering. These figures establish the scale and institutional relevance of the program. However, the number of enrolled students alone cannot establish

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whether recruitment performance is satisfactory or whether the institution is experiencing an enrollment shortfall. Such an assessment requires additional evidence, including the institution's enrollment targets, historical enrollment trends, numbers of inquiries and applications, application-to-enrollment conversion rates, and reasons prospective applicants discontinue the admission process. In the absence of these indicators, the present study does not assume that the institution has experienced declining enrollment. Instead, it investigates the factors associated with study decisions within an established RPL program, providing evidence that may inform future recruitment and student-engagement strategies.

The decision to pursue higher education through RPL differs in important respects from conventional university selection (Baliyan & Mokoena, 2024). Working professionals may need to evaluate the time and financial costs of studying, the compatibility of academic activities with employment, the likelihood that prior learning will be recognized, and the potential contribution of a qualification to career development. Uncertainty regarding eligibility, documentation, credit recognition, and study arrangements may delay or discourage enrollment. Consequently, institutional recruitment strategies need to provide accessible information, credible recommendations, and responsive assistance throughout the decision-making process (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Juhaidi et al., 2025).

Digital promotion is one factor that may influence prospective students' decisions. Social media, institutional websites, online advertising, and other digital platforms enable higher education institutions to provide information quickly and reach prospective students more broadly (Juhaidi, 2024a; Pawar, 2024). For RPL, accessible and clear digital information can help prospective students understand admission procedures, study flexibility, costs, and the benefits of the program. Previous studies have indicated that digital marketing can influence awareness, interest, and decision-making, although its effectiveness may vary depending on the target audience and the quality of information provided (Perera et al., 2023; Zeqiri et al., 2024).

Referral is another factor that may influence study decisions. Recommendations from alumni, current students, family members, colleagues, and professional networks can provide prospective students with information based on personal experience (Mahendri et al., 2024; Wulandari & Irwansyah, 2025). Such recommendations may be perceived as more credible than formal promotional messages and can reduce uncertainty when choosing an educational institution (Juhaidi, 2024b; Raya et al., 2024). This factor is particularly relevant to RPL because prospective students may need greater confidence regarding learning quality, study flexibility, administrative procedures, and potential career benefits.

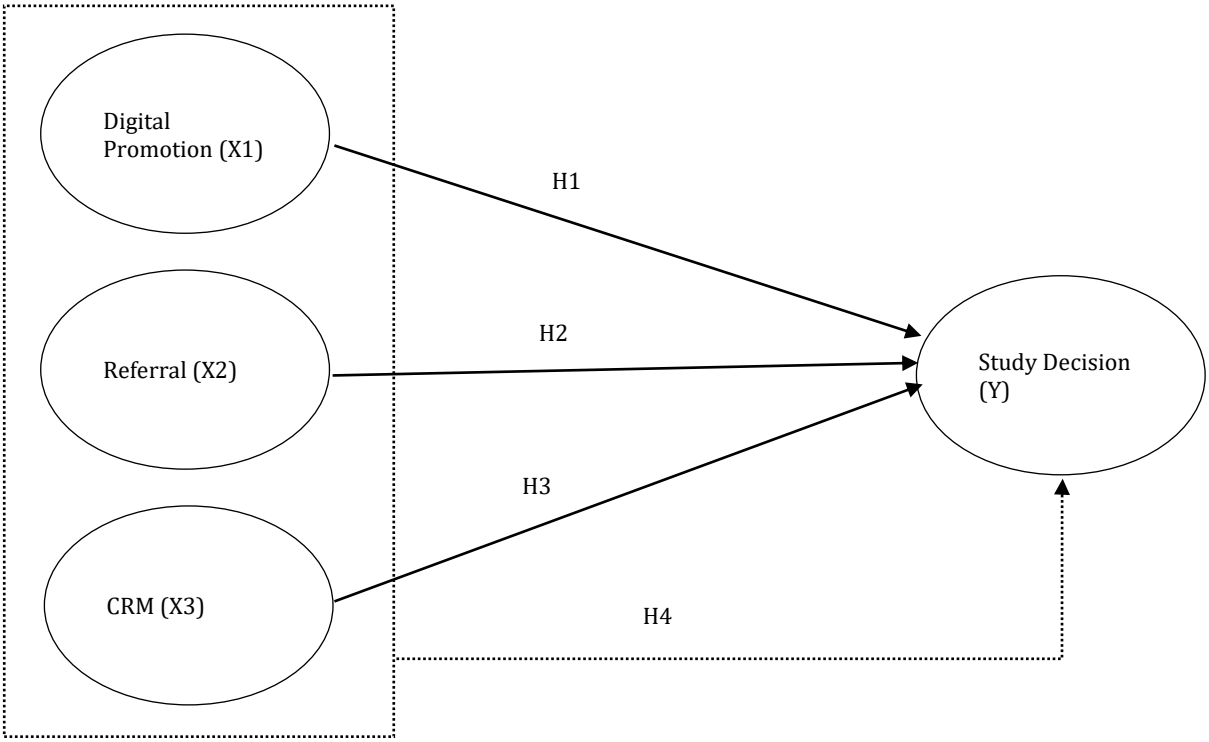
Customer Relationship Management (CRM) may also influence prospective students' decisions. In higher education, CRM involves managing relationships with prospective and current students through effective communication, responsive services, information provision, and attention to individual needs (Shalihati et al., 2025; Kayal & Billah, 2026). For RPL, responsive communication and accessible consultation are important because prospective students may require personalized information concerning eligibility, document requirements, credit recognition, and study arrangements. Effective CRM can therefore strengthen trust and confidence in the institution (Nanda et al., 2023).

Although previous studies have examined digital promotion, referral, and CRM in relation to consumer and educational decision-making, research integrating these three factors in the RPL context remains limited (Taurino & Handoyo, 2023). Most previous studies focus on conventional students, general university selection, or business and consumer contexts. In addition, previous findings regarding the effects of digital promotion, referral, and CRM are not always consistent. This indicates the need for further empirical investigation, particularly in private higher education institutions offering RPL in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of digital promotion, referral, and CRM on study decisions in the RPL pathway at Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis ASIA Malang, both partially and simultaneously. The study is expected to contribute to the higher education marketing literature and provide practical insights for institutions in developing more effective recruitment strategies for RPL students. Based on the research objectives, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

- H1: Digital promotion has a positive and significant effect on study decision.
- H2: Referral has a positive and significant effect on study decision.
- H3: Customer relationship management has a positive and significant effect on study decision.
- H4: Digital promotion, referral, and customer relationship management simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on study decision.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



2. Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design (Sugiyono, 2022). The study was conducted to examine the effects of digital promotion, referral, and customer relationship management (CRM) on study decisions in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) pathway at Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis ASIA Malang. A survey method was used to collect primary data through a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Form. The collected data were analyzed using multiple linear regression with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics.

The population consisted of all students enrolled through the RPL pathway at Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis ASIA Malang in 2025, totaling 152 students. The population comprised 108 students from the Management program and 44 students from the Informatics Engineering program. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 110 respondents. Respondents were selected based on the predetermined characteristics relevant to the research objectives, namely students enrolled through the RPL pathway at Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis ASIA Malang. The sampling technique was purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2022). Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire was developed based on the operational indicators of the four research variables: digital promotion, referral, CRM, and study decision. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Secondary data were obtained from institutional documents and relevant academic literature, including journal articles, books, and other scholarly sources related to digital promotion, referral, CRM, study decisions, and RPL.

Digital promotion was operationalized through ease of access to digital information, attractiveness of promotional content, social media promotion intensity, digital interactivity, and clarity of RPL information. Referral was measured through recommendations from alumni and current students,

recommendations from family members and work colleagues, trust in recommendations, and the influence of other people's experiences. CRM covered information-service quality, communication response speed, accessibility of academic consultation, institutional attention, and communication comfort. Study decision was measured through confidence in choosing RPL, interest in studying, the reported registration decision, perceived suitability for educational needs, and career considerations.

The final questionnaire should be reproduced in an appendix, including the exact wording of every item, its corresponding construct and indicator, the response scale, and the original source or adaptation used. For each adapted item, the authors should identify the source and explain whether the wording was translated, modified, or newly developed for the RPL setting. Any translation or pilot-testing procedures should be reported only if they were actually performed.

Because the available methodological record identifies the constructs and indicators but does not reproduce the original item-level questionnaire, the exact wording and item-to-source mapping cannot be verified from the information currently reported. The final manuscript should therefore incorporate the original Google Forms questionnaire or the questionnaire file used during data collection rather than reconstructing the items retrospectively.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, validity and reliability testing, classical assumption testing, multiple linear regression, partial significance testing (t-test), simultaneous significance testing (F-test), and the coefficient of determination (R^2). Validity testing was conducted to assess whether each questionnaire item adequately measured its intended construct, while reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of each variable. The instruments were considered reliable when the Cronbach's alpha value met the predetermined threshold (Ghozali, 2021). Classical assumption testing included normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests. Normality was assessed to determine whether the regression residuals followed an approximately normal distribution. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values, while heteroscedasticity was examined based on the distribution of residuals. Multiple linear regression was used to examine the effects of digital promotion, referral, and CRM on study decision.

The t-test was used to examine the partial effect of each independent variable on study decision, whereas the F-test was used to determine whether the independent variables jointly influenced study decision. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the proportion of variation in study decision explained by the research model (Ghozali, 2021).

Data were collected from respondents who participated voluntarily through an online questionnaire. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of their responses for academic research. The data were treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

3. Result

This study involved 110 respondents who were students of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Program at Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis ASIA Malang. All respondents were private-sector employees, reflecting the target characteristics of the RPL program, which is designed to accommodate individuals with prior work and learning experience. The characteristics of respondents based on gender and age are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Respondents Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56	50.9
	Female	54	49.1
Age	25–28 years	41	37.3
	29–32 years	40	36.4

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	33–35 years	29	26.4

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with male respondents accounting for 50.9% and female respondents 49.1%. Most respondents were between 25 and 32 years old (73.7%), indicating that the respondents were predominantly individuals of productive working age. The fact that all respondents were private-sector employees is particularly relevant to the RPL context, as the program provides an alternative pathway for working individuals to pursue higher education while recognizing their previous learning and professional experience.

The research variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The interpretation of the mean scores was categorized into five levels, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean Scores Interpretation

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.0–1.7	Very Low
1.8–2.5	Low
2.6–3.3	Moderate
3.4–4.1	High
4.2–5.0	Very High

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

The descriptive results for Digital Promotion (X1), Referral (X2), Customer Relationship Management (X3), and Study Decision (Y) are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Indicator	Mean	Category
Digital Promotion (X1)	Ease of access	3.48	High
	Digital content attractiveness	3.53	High
	Social media promotion intensity	3.45	High
	Digital media interactivity	3.34	Moderate
	Clarity of RPL information	3.25	Moderate
	Variable Mean	3.41	High
Referral (X2)	Alumni recommendation	3.18	Moderate
	Active student recommendation	3.46	High
	Family/work colleague recommendation	3.29	Moderate
	Level of trust	3.27	Moderate
	Influence of others' experience	3.35	Moderate
	Variable Mean	3.31	Moderate
CRM (X3)	Information service quality	3.27	Moderate
	Communication response speed	3.27	Moderate
	Ease of academic consultation	3.31	Moderate
	Institutional attention	3.26	Moderate
	Communication comfort	3.28	Moderate
	Variable Mean	3.28	Moderate
Study Decision (Y)	Confidence in choosing RPL	3.25	Moderate
	Study interest	3.25	Moderate

Variable	Indicator	Mean	Category
	Registration decision	3.19	Moderate
	Suitability with educational needs	3.24	Moderate
	Career consideration	3.20	Moderate
	Variable Mean	3.23	Moderate

Source: Primary data processed, 2026.

The results indicate that Digital Promotion was the only independent variable with a high overall mean score (3.41). Its highest-rated indicator was digital content attractiveness (3.53), suggesting that respondents generally perceived the institution's digital promotional content as sufficiently appealing. However, clarity of RPL information received the lowest score (3.25), indicating that technical information concerning the RPL mechanism, requirements, and credit conversion could still be improved.

Referral obtained an overall mean of 3.31, categorized as moderate. The highest score was found for recommendations from active students (3.46), while alumni recommendations received the lowest score (3.18). This suggests that prospective students may place greater value on information obtained from individuals who are currently experiencing the RPL learning process.

CRM also obtained a moderate overall mean of 3.28. Academic consultation was the highest-rated indicator (3.31), whereas institutional attention received the lowest score (3.26). This indicates that although communication and consultation services were generally considered adequate, the institution still has opportunities to provide more personalized services according to the needs of working students.

Meanwhile, Study Decision obtained an overall mean of 3.23, which falls into the moderate category. Confidence in choosing RPL and study interest obtained the highest scores (3.25 each), whereas the actual registration decision had the lowest score (3.19). Thus, respondents generally showed interest in and consideration of the RPL program, but the transition from interest to an actual registration decision remained relatively weak.

The validity test was conducted by comparing the calculated correlation coefficient (r-count) with the critical value of 0.1874. All questionnaire items had r-count values greater than the critical value, indicating that all items were valid. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum acceptable value of 0.60.

Table 4 Validity and Reliability Results

Variable	Range of r-count	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Digital Promotion (X1)	0.649–0.758	0.757	Valid and Reliable
Referral (X2)	0.719–0.833	0.847	Valid and Reliable
CRM (X3)	0.710–0.746	0.780	Valid and Reliable
Study Decision (Y)	0.766–0.809	0.840	Valid and Reliable

Source: SPSS 26 output, processed 2026

The results demonstrate that all measurement items met the validity criteria. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.757 to 0.847, exceeding the threshold of 0.60. Therefore, all instruments demonstrated adequate internal consistency and were suitable for subsequent statistical analysis.

The regression model was tested for normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity before hypothesis testing.

Table 5 Classical Assumption Test Results

Test	Indicator	Result	Conclusion
Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig.	0.200	Normal

Test	Indicator	Result	Conclusion
Multicollinearity – X1	Tolerance / VIF	0.907 / 1.102	No multicollinearity
Multicollinearity – X2	Tolerance / VIF	0.936 / 1.068	No multicollinearity
Multicollinearity – X3	Tolerance / VIF	0.912 / 1.096	No multicollinearity
Heteroscedasticity	Scatterplot	Random distribution	No heteroscedasticity
Autocorrelation	Durbin-Watson	2.009	No indication of autocorrelation

Source: SPSS 26 output, processed 2026

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value of 0.200 was greater than 0.05, indicating normally distributed residuals. All tolerance values exceeded 0.10 and all VIF values were substantially below 10, demonstrating that the independent variables were not affected by multicollinearity. The scatterplot also showed randomly distributed residuals around zero without a systematic pattern, indicating no heteroscedasticity. The Durbin-Watson value of 2.009 further indicated no meaningful autocorrelation problem.

Multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the effects of Digital Promotion, Referral, and CRM on Study Decision.

Table 6 Multiple Linear Regression Results

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	-2.537	1.852	–	-1.370	0.174
Digital Promotion (X1)	0.568	0.086	0.474	6.598	0.000
Referral (X2)	0.211	0.071	0.209	2.951	0.004
CRM (X3)	0.336	0.079	0.305	4.254	0.000

Source: SPSS 26 output, processed 2026

The regression equation is:

$$Y = -2.537 + 0.568X1 + 0.211X2 + 0.336X3$$

The three independent variables have positive regression coefficients. Digital Promotion has the largest standardized coefficient (β = 0.474), followed by CRM (β = 0.305) and Referral (β = 0.209). This indicates that, when the other variables are held constant, improvements in each independent variable are associated with an increase in Study Decision. The coefficient of determination and overall model fit are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Model Summary and Simultaneous Test

Statistic	Value
R	0.709
R Square	0.503
Adjusted R Square	0.488
F-value	35.698
Sig. F	0.000
Durbin-Watson	2.009

Source: SPSS 26 output, processed 2026

The R value of 0.709 indicates a strong relationship between the three independent variables and Study Decision. The R^2 value of 0.503 indicates that 50.3% of the variation in Study Decision is explained jointly by Digital Promotion, Referral, and CRM, while the remaining 49.7% is attributable to other factors outside the model. The F-test yielded a value of 35.698 with a significance level of 0.000, confirming that the regression model is statistically significant. The results of the partial and simultaneous hypothesis tests are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Test Value	Sig.	Result
H1	Digital Promotion → Study Decision	t = 6.598	0.000	Accepted
H2	Referral → Study Decision	t = 2.951	0.004	Accepted
H3	CRM → Study Decision	t = 4.254	0.000	Accepted
H4	Digital Promotion, Referral & CRM → Study Decision	F = 35.698	0.000	Accepted

Source: SPSS 26 output, processed 2026.

The results demonstrate that all four hypotheses are supported. Digital Promotion, Referral, and CRM each have a positive and statistically significant partial effect on Study Decision. Furthermore, the three variables simultaneously have a significant effect on Study Decision.

4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Digital Promotion has a positive and significant effect on Study Decision, as indicated by a regression coefficient of 0.568, standardized beta of 0.474, t-value of 6.598, and significance value of 0.000. Therefore, H1 is supported. Among all independent variables examined, Digital Promotion has the largest standardized coefficient, indicating that it is the most dominant predictor of students' decisions to choose the RPL program.

The result can be interpreted through the information-search demands of working professionals. Unlike traditional prospective students, employees considering RPL must evaluate the feasibility of returning to education alongside existing professional and personal responsibilities. Before committing to enrollment, they may need to establish whether their previous learning is eligible for recognition, which documents are required, how academic credits are assessed, and how study activities can be accommodated within their work schedules. Digital channels can make these questions easier to investigate and can reduce the effort required to obtain initial information.

The descriptive findings provide further explanation for this result. Digital Promotion obtained the highest overall mean among the independent variables (3.41), categorized as high. In particular, the attractiveness of digital content received the highest mean score (3.53), followed by ease of access (3.48) and social media promotion intensity (3.45). These findings suggest that digital platforms play an important role in helping prospective students become aware of and develop interest in the RPL program.

However, two aspects remain relatively weak: digital media interactivity (3.34) and clarity of RPL information (3.25). This finding is important because attractive promotional content alone may not be sufficient to convert interest into an actual registration decision. Prospective students need clear information regarding eligibility, procedures, required documents, learning mechanisms, and the recognition or conversion of previous learning into academic credits.

Theoretically, the result extends a digital-marketing perspective to a higher education pathway in which the service being evaluated is complex and dependent on individual eligibility. It suggests that digital promotion is relevant to study decisions when it supports both initial awareness and the assessment of program suitability. However, because information quality, trust, and perceived risk were not separately modeled, the proposed psychological mechanisms remain interpretations that future research should test directly.

The finding is consistent with the digital marketing perspective of Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022), which emphasizes the ability of digital channels to increase awareness, engagement, and access to information throughout the consumer decision-making process. It is also consistent with the findings of Juhaidi (2024a), Perera et al. (2023), and Zeqiri et al. (2024), who reported positive relationships between digital promotion and consumer decision or purchase intention.

Nevertheless, the present finding also provides a different perspective from Juhaidi et al. (2025) and Taurino and Handoyo (2023), who reported that digital marketing does not necessarily produce a direct effect without supporting factors such as trust and brand awareness. The current study suggests that, within the RPL context, digital promotion can have a direct and significant role in study decisions. However, its effectiveness should not be interpreted as being independent of other institutional factors. The relatively low score for clarity of RPL information indicates that digital promotion needs to be integrated with informative and responsive communication.

Referral also has a positive and significant effect on Study Decision, with a regression coefficient of 0.211, standardized beta of 0.209, t-value of 2.951, and significance value of 0.004. Thus, H2 is supported. Although Referral has the smallest standardized coefficient among the three independent variables, its statistically significant effect confirms that recommendations and experiences communicated by other people remain relevant in the decision-making process of RPL students.

The descriptive analysis shows that Referral obtained an overall mean of 3.31, categorized as moderate. Interestingly, recommendations from active students recorded the highest score (3.46), while alumni recommendations had the lowest score (3.18). This pattern suggests that prospective students may find the experiences of individuals who are currently enrolled in the RPL program more relevant and convincing than information from graduates.

This finding can be understood from the characteristics of the respondents. All respondents were private-sector employees, meaning that they are likely to consider practical information regarding learning flexibility, administrative procedures, workload, and the compatibility of study with employment. Active students are able to provide current and directly relevant experiences regarding these issues.

The relatively modest standardized coefficient for referral also cautions against treating interpersonal recommendations as a substitute for institutional communication. Recommendations may help applicants interpret their options, but applicants still need accurate program information and reliable answers to administrative questions. Referral is consequently best understood as a complementary source of credibility within a broader decision process.

The theoretical contribution is to position referral alongside institutional digital communication and relationship-oriented service within an RPL decision-making model. This integrated perspective recognizes that educational choices may involve both independent information search and social evaluation. Future studies could test whether trust mediates the relationship between referral and study decisions, or whether the strength of referral differs according to the source of the recommendation, such as current students, alumni, family members, or professional colleagues.

The finding supports Raya et al. (2024) and Wulandari and Irwansyah (2025), who found that word-of-mouth and referral can significantly influence prospective students' decisions in selecting higher education institutions because information from personal networks is often perceived as more credible than formal institutional promotion. The result is also consistent with Baliyan and Mokoena (2024) and Mahendri et al. (2024), who found that referral is not necessarily the dominant factor in educational decision-making because prospective students simultaneously consider other factors, including cost and program flexibility.

Therefore, referral should be viewed as a supporting mechanism rather than a substitute for institutional promotion. ITB ASIA Malang can strengthen this mechanism through structured student ambassador programs, student testimonials, referral campaigns, and experience-sharing sessions involving current RPL students. Such activities may increase the credibility of digital promotional messages and reduce uncertainty among prospective students.

The results show that CRM has a positive and significant effect on Study Decision, with a regression coefficient of 0.336, standardized beta of 0.305, t-value of 4.254, and significance value of 0.000. Therefore, H3 is supported. CRM has the second-largest standardized beta after Digital Promotion,

demonstrating that service quality and relationship management are important factors in converting prospective students' interest into study decisions. The relevance of CRM can be understood in terms of the individual nature of RPL applications. Applicants may have different employment histories, previously acquired competencies, educational qualifications, and documentation requirements. General promotional messages cannot resolve every applicant's specific questions. Direct communication and accessible consultation may help individuals determine which steps they need to take and whether the program fits their circumstances.

The descriptive analysis shows that CRM has an overall mean of 3.28, which falls within the moderate category. The highest-rated dimension was ease of academic consultation (3.31), while institutional attention received the lowest score (3.26). Communication response speed and information service quality also remained within the moderate category.

These findings indicate that the institution has established a functional communication and consultation process, but the service has not yet reached an optimal level. This is particularly relevant to RPL students because the majority of respondents are working adults who may require flexible communication schedules, quick responses, and personalized explanations regarding academic procedures.

The finding is consistent with Shalihati et al. (2025), Kayal and Billah (2026), and Guerola-Navarro et al. (2021), who found that CRM contributes positively to customer or student satisfaction and strengthens long-term relationships. In the context of higher education, effective relationship management can reduce uncertainty, improve the perceived quality of institutional services, and strengthen students' confidence in their educational choices.

However, the findings also provide a useful contrast with Nanda et al. (2023), who reported that CRM does not necessarily have a significant effect when institutional communication fails to meet customer expectations. In the present study, CRM was significant, but its descriptive score remained moderate. This suggests that the existence of CRM is important, but its quality and consistency determine how effectively it contributes to study decisions.

For this reason, the institution should improve response speed, provide clearer information through integrated communication channels, and develop more personalized assistance for prospective RPL students. Such improvements may be particularly effective in addressing the gap between initial interest and actual registration.

The simultaneous test confirms that Digital Promotion, Referral, and CRM jointly have a significant effect on Study Decision. The F-value of 35.698 with a significance level of 0.000 indicates that the regression model is statistically significant. Furthermore, the R^2 value of 0.503 demonstrates that the three variables jointly explain 50.3% of the variation in Study Decision, while the remaining 49.7% is attributable to other factors not included in the model.

This finding demonstrates that students' decisions to choose the RPL program are multidimensional rather than determined by a single promotional factor. Digital Promotion functions primarily as an information and awareness mechanism, Referral provides social validation and credibility, while CRM supports the decision-making process through direct institutional interaction and service quality.

The relative contribution of each variable provides an important strategic implication. Digital Promotion has the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.474$), followed by CRM ($\beta = 0.305$) and Referral ($\beta = 0.209$). This indicates that institutional strategy should not focus exclusively on increasing promotional exposure. Instead, digital promotion should be connected with credible testimonials and responsive follow-up services.

The descriptive findings further reinforce this conclusion. Although Digital Promotion was categorized as high, Referral, CRM, and Study Decision remained in the moderate category. In particular, the lowest score for Study Decision was found in the actual registration decision (3.19). This indicates a potential conversion gap: prospective students may already be exposed to promotional information and show

interest in the program, but additional assurance and assistance are required before they proceed to registration.

The model's R^2 value of 50.3% also suggests that other factors should be considered in future research. These may include tuition fees, institutional reputation, personal motivation, family support, career prospects, program flexibility, and socioeconomic conditions. Including these variables may provide a more comprehensive explanation of how prospective students make decisions regarding higher education through the RPL pathway.

Taken together, the findings establish that Digital Promotion, Referral, and CRM constitute complementary factors in influencing Study Decision among RPL students at Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis ASIA Malang. Digital Promotion serves as the strongest driver, particularly through accessible and attractive content. Referral strengthens credibility through the experiences of other students, while CRM provides direct institutional support that facilitates the decision-making process.

The results also reveal that the institution's main challenge is not merely generating awareness, but converting awareness and interest into actual enrollment decisions. This is reflected in the moderate score for Study Decision (3.23), particularly the relatively low score for the registration decision (3.19). Consequently, promotional strategies should be designed as an integrated process beginning with digital awareness, followed by social proof through referrals, and ending with personalized CRM-based assistance.

A practical strategy can therefore be summarized as follows:

Digital Promotion → Interest and Awareness → Referral/Testimonials → Trust and Social Validation → CRM Assistance → Registration Decision

This scheme illustrates that the three independent variables should not be implemented separately. Attractive digital promotion can generate initial interest, referral can strengthen credibility, and CRM can address individual questions and reduce uncertainty before registration. Such an integrated approach is particularly appropriate for the RPL program because its target market consists largely of working adults who require accessible information, credible experiences, flexible services, and efficient communication before committing to higher education.

Overall, the findings support all proposed hypotheses and provide empirical evidence that strengthening digital promotional activities, referral mechanisms, and customer relationship management simultaneously can contribute substantially to increasing study decisions within the RPL program. However, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the study used a cross-sectional questionnaire, so the temporal order of the variables cannot be established. Although the regression coefficients are positive and statistically significant, the results do not demonstrate that the predictors caused respondents to make their study decisions. Reverse relationships and unmeasured confounding factors remain possible.

Second, the respondents were students already enrolled through the RPL pathway. They may differ from prospective applicants who considered the program but did not apply or enroll. The study therefore describes reported perceptions among enrolled students and cannot directly explain the experiences of non-enrollees or estimate the institution's inquiry-to-enrollment conversion rate.

Third, purposive sampling limits statistical generalizability. Although 110 respondents were selected from a population of 152 students, the use of a Slovin-based sample-size calculation does not remove selection bias or guarantee a probability-based margin of error. Future studies could use a census or probability-based sampling design where feasible.

Fourth, the constructs were measured through self-reported questionnaire responses collected using the same method. Shared response tendencies, recall error, and social desirability may influence the

observed associations. Future research could combine survey data with administrative measures, such as inquiry records, application completion, response times, and verified enrollment outcomes.

Fifth, the reported measures capture perceptions of digital promotion, referral, CRM, and study decisions, but the available manuscript does not document the exact wording and source of each questionnaire item. The instrument appendix and scale provenance must be completed to enable replication and a more rigorous assessment of construct validity. The current validity and reliability statistics establish preliminary measurement evidence but do not, on their own, demonstrate full construct validity.

Finally, the study was conducted at one institution and examined three predictors. Institutional policies, program characteristics, tuition arrangements, regional labor markets, and other unmeasured factors may influence study decisions elsewhere. Future research should test the model across multiple institutions and include additional variables, as well as longitudinal or behavioral measures, to examine the proposed decision mechanisms more directly.

5. Conclusion

Digital promotion, referral, and customer relationship management (CRM) are each positively and significantly associated with prospective students' decisions to enroll in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Program at ITB ASIA Malang. Together, these three predictors account for a substantial share of the variation in study decisions, and the remaining variation is attributable to factors outside the research model. Among them, digital promotion shows the strongest standardized association, indicating that the accessibility, attractiveness, and quality of digital information play a central role in drawing prospective students to the program. The descriptive results also show that information about RPL remains unclear, particularly regarding program mechanisms, admission requirements, and credit conversion, which makes the clarity of digital content a priority for improvement.

CRM and referral also contribute meaningfully to students' decisions. Service quality, communication responsiveness, academic consultation, and institutional attention shape these decisions, although CRM is rated only moderately, pointing to inconsistent service and limited personalized attention for working adults. Referral has a smaller association with decisions, but recommendations from peers, alumni, family members, and colleagues strengthen prospective students' confidence in the program.

Theoretically, the findings extend marketing perspectives on educational choice to the RPL context, suggesting that information acquisition and interpersonal and institutional support operate together in shaping enrollment decisions. The study does not establish a new causal theory. Its cross-sectional design and single-institution sample identify associations rather than causal mechanisms, and the perceived clarity of information, the credibility of referrals, and the personalization of service remain untested as mediating or moderating processes. Practically, ITB ASIA Malang should prioritize clearer and more interactive digital content, strengthen CRM through consistent and personalized service for working prospective students, and establish structured referral activities involving active students and alumni. Future research should use longitudinal designs and multi-institution samples to test these mechanisms directly, and should incorporate tuition fees, institutional reputation, career prospects, family support, and economic conditions to provide a more complete explanation of enrollment decisions.

Author contributions

First Author: Conceptualization, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, and original draft. Second Author: Data curation, investigation, resources, software, validation, writing - editing. Third Author: Investigation, review and editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing financial interests that could have appeared to influence the work.

Publication ethics

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee.

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