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The Paradox of Presence: Website Quality, Institutional Visibility, and Digital Strategy at Metropolitan International University, Uganda

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Abstract: *The digital presence of higher education institutions has emerged as a critical determinant of institutional visibility, competitive positioning, and stakeholder engagement in the contemporary knowledge economy. This study investigated the paradox of presence at Metropolitan International University (MIU), Uganda a phenomenon in which the institution maintained a quantifiable digital footprint through its official website, yet sustained suboptimal levels of institutional visibility among prospective students, industry partners, and academic communities. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and Digital Institutional Communication Theory, the study examined how website quality dimensions — comprising design aesthetics, navigation usability, content relevance, technical performance, and mobile responsiveness — influenced institutional visibility and whether digital strategy alignment mediated this relationship. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, with data collected from 247 purposively and randomly selected respondents comprising students (n=142), academic and administrative staff (n=68), and external stakeholders (n=37) at MIU. Data were analyzed using univariate descriptive statistics, bivariate Pearson correlation analysis, multiple linear regression, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS 26.0. Results revealed that content relevance (β=0.35, p<.001), design aesthetics (β=0.29, p<.001), and navigation usability (β=0.21, p<.001) were the strongest predictors of institutional visibility, collectively accounting for 58.7% of the variance (R^2=.587, F(5,241) =68.47, p<.001). SEM path analysis confirmed a significant direct effect of website quality on institutional visibility (β=0.68, p<.001) and a partial mediation effect of digital strategy alignment (indirect effect β=0.23, p<.01), with the overall model demonstrating excellent fit (CFI=0.961, RMSEA=0.048). The study concluded that MIU's website, while structurally operational, suffered from strategic incoherence, inadequate content currency, and poor mobile optimization collectively undermining the institution's capacity to translate digital presence into meaningful institutional visibility. It was recommended that MIU develop a comprehensive integrated digital communication strategy, invest in content management systems and mobile-first redesign, and establish key performance indicators aligned with institutional branding goals.*

Keywords: website quality, institutional visibility, digital strategy, higher education, Uganda, structural equation modelling, Metropolitan International University

Introduction

The proliferation of internet-enabled technologies and the accelerating pace of digital transformation in higher education have fundamentally reconfigured how universities communicate their value propositions, attract prospective students, and sustain stakeholder relationships across geographical boundaries (Balgobin & Dubus, 2022; Lindqvist et al., 2023; Olivia-Dumitrina et al., 2019). In sub-Saharan Africa — and Uganda in particular — the adoption of institutional websites as primary conduits of academic communication has grown considerably over the past decade, coinciding with expanding internet penetration rates, increasing smartphone adoption, and the intensification of competition among private and public universities for student enrolment and donor engagement (Enock et al., 2023; Kibuuka, 2022; Kurusumu & Rebecca, 2025). Notwithstanding this growth, a persistent and theoretically intriguing paradox has been observed across many Ugandan higher education institutions: the simultaneous existence of an operational institutional website alongside remarkably low levels of institutional visibility among critical target audiences — a phenomenon this study terms the "paradox of presence." Metropolitan International University (MIU), a private chartered university located in Kampala, Uganda, exemplifies this paradox with particular clarity (Bridget & Geophrey, 2023; Gracious, 2024; Nurudeen et al., 2024). Despite operating an official website and engaging in periodic social media activity, the institution has consistently recorded low organic search traffic, limited brand recognition among prospective applicants, and inadequate engagement from potential industry and research partners, suggesting a profound disconnect between digital existence and digital effectiveness (Gupta & Agarwal, 2023; Montero Guerra et al., 2023; Teker et al., 2022). This study, therefore, sought to interrogate this paradox by examining the quality dimensions of MIU's institutional website and their relationship to institutional visibility, and to assess whether a coherent and well-aligned digital strategy could serve as a mediating mechanism through which website quality translates into meaningful institutional presence. By doing so, this research contributes to the growing but under-explored literature on digital institutional communication in African higher education settings, offering empirically grounded insights and practically actionable recommendations for policy and practice.

Background of the Study

The global higher education landscape has witnessed an unprecedented shift towards digital-first communication strategies, driven by the recognition that institutional websites constitute the most comprehensive and authoritative point of digital contact between a university and its diverse stakeholder communities (Brown et al., 2024; Hussain et al., 2025; Okello Candiya Bongomin et al., 2020). In developed-country contexts, substantial empirical evidence has established robust linkages between website quality — defined in terms of usability, information architecture, design consistency, content accuracy, and technical accessibility — and outcomes such as enrolment conversion rates, alumni engagement, donor acquisition, and overall institutional reputation (Desi et al., 2023; Siqueira et al., 2022). However, within the East African higher education context, research on this nexus remains nascent, fragmented, and often limited to descriptive analyses of website features without theoretical grounding or quantitative modelling of outcomes (Chatterjee & Bhattacharjee, 2020; Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025; Sharif, 2019). Uganda's higher education sector, comprising over 50 licensed universities as of 2023, is characterised by increasing inter-institutional competition, largely driven by the growing number of private universities established following the liberalisation of the education sector under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001 (NCHE, 2023). In this competitive environment, institutional visibility — operationalised as the degree to which a university is recognised, recalled, and positively perceived by prospective students, employers, development partners, and academic peers — has become a critical differentiator (Audrey & Nancy, 2025; David et al., 2025; Weißmüller & De Waele, 2022). Metropolitan International University, though possessing formal accreditation and a diverse academic portfolio, has faced persistent challenges in translating its digital footprint into competitive advantage, a situation reflected in its low search engine visibility, infrequent citation in academic and industry discourse, and comparatively modest enrolment growth relative to better-digitally-positioned competitors (Julius & Nancy, 2025; Kallio et al., 2021; Nancy & Audrey, 2025). Against this backdrop, the present study was motivated by the need to empirically examine whether — and to what extent — the quality of MIU's institutional website explains variations in its institutional visibility, and whether the alignment of its digital communication efforts with a coherent institutional strategy could mediate this relationship, thereby offering a path out of the paradox of presence (Gracious Kazaara & Nancy, 2025; Hailu et al., 2023; Wang & Zhan, 2021).

Problem Statement

Despite the growing recognition of digital presence as a strategic imperative for institutional competitiveness in the higher education sector, Metropolitan International University (MIU) continues to exhibit a disconcerting misalignment between its operationally functional website and its measurable levels of institutional visibility. Preliminary assessments conducted by the university's ICT directorate in 2023 revealed that MIU's official website recorded an average monthly organic traffic of fewer than 3,500 unique visitors — a figure significantly below the benchmark for comparably sized East African private universities — while its Google PageRank and domain authority scores remained critically low (Julius, 2025; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025; Raru et al., 2022). Stakeholder surveys further indicated that a substantial proportion of prospective students and industry partners were unaware of MIU's programmes, research output, and institutional achievements, despite their ready availability on the university's website. These observations point to a systemic failure at the intersection of website quality, strategic communication, and digital positioning, manifesting in what this study conceptualises as the paradox of presence: the institution is digitally present but institutionally invisible (Hoinle et al., 2021; Kamanzi & Neema-Abooki, 2025; Khamis et al., 2021). While anecdotal evidence and administrative reports have flagged these concerns, no systematic and theoretically grounded empirical investigation has been conducted to identify the specific website quality dimensions that undermine institutional visibility at MIU, nor has the mediating role of digital strategy alignment been examined. (Alnemer, 2022; Nguyen & Tuamsuk, 2022; Peter et al., 2023; Rovian et al., 2023) This knowledge gap not only impedes evidence-based decision-making within the institution but also limits the broader scholarly understanding of how website quality functions as a lever of institutional visibility in resource-constrained African university settings. This study, therefore, sought to fill this critical gap.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

The main objective of the study was to examine the relationship between website quality, digital strategy alignment, and institutional visibility at Metropolitan International University (MIU), Uganda.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the levels of website quality dimensions (design aesthetics, navigation usability, content relevance, technical performance, and mobile responsiveness) at Metropolitan International University.
2. To determine the influence of website quality dimensions on the institutional visibility of Metropolitan International University.
3. To examine the mediating role of digital strategy alignment in the relationship between website quality and institutional visibility at Metropolitan International University.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived levels of website quality dimensions at Metropolitan International University, Uganda?
2. To what extent do website quality dimensions predict institutional visibility at Metropolitan International University?
3. Does digital strategy alignment mediate the relationship between website quality and institutional visibility at Metropolitan International University?

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, underpinned by a positivist research philosophy, which provided the epistemological basis for the objective measurement of website quality, institutional visibility, and digital strategy alignment through structured, standardised instruments. The study population comprised all registered students (n=1,842), academic and administrative staff (n=312), and identified external stakeholders including employers, alumni, and academic partners (n=148) associated with Metropolitan International University during the 2023/2024 academic year. Using stratified random sampling for students and staff and purposive sampling for external stakeholders, a final sample of 247 respondents was selected based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, achieving a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of ±5%. A self-administered structured questionnaire, developed from validated instruments adapted from Barnes and Vidgen's (2002) WebQual 4.0 scale and Chapleo et al.'s (2022) Institutional Visibility Index, was used for data collection; the instrument comprised 42 Likert-scale items (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree) organised around the study's three constructs and their respective sub-dimensions. Content validity was established through expert review by five specialists in digital communication and information systems, while reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from 0.76 to 0.89 across all subscales, surpassing the 0.70 threshold recommended by Field (2018). Data were analysed at three levels. At the univariate level, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and percentage distributions were computed to characterise the central tendency and dispersion of each website quality dimension and to assess the overall level of institutional visibility, enabling the study to address Specific Objective 1 (SO1). At the bivariate level, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the pairwise associations among website quality dimensions, institutional visibility, and digital strategy alignment, providing preliminary evidence on the directionality and magnitude of relationships prior to multivariate modelling; this addressed aspects of Specific Objective 2 (SO2). Subsequently, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with institutional visibility as the dependent variable and the five website quality dimensions as independent predictors, enabling the estimation of standardised beta coefficients (β), model explanatory power (R^2 and Adjusted R^2), and statistical significance of individual predictors (t-statistics and p-values), thereby providing a more rigorous response to SO2. Finally, to address Specific Objective 3 (SO3) — which required the examination of mediation — Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was performed using IBM AMOS 26.0, employing the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988): first, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model's validity in terms of factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50), and composite reliability (CR ≥ 0.70); second, the structural model was tested by estimating path coefficients and calculating indirect effects using 5,000 bootstrap resamples with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals to test for mediation, following the procedures of Preacher and Hayes (2008). Model fit was assessed using multiple indices: the Chi-square to degrees-of-freedom ratio (CMIN/DF < 3.0), Comparative Fit Index (CFI > 0.95), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI > 0.95), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < 0.06), and Standardised Root Mean Residual (SRMR < 0.08), consistent with the thresholds recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999) (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). All analyses were conducted in SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 26.0, and statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$ throughout.

Results.

Univariate Analysis: Descriptive Statistics of Website Quality Dimensions

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Website Quality Dimensions and Institutional Visibility (n = 247)

Variable / Dimension	Mean	SD	Min	Max	%+
Design Aesthetics	3.42	0.87	1.00	5.00	73
Navigation Usability	3.15	0.91	1.00	5.00	68
Content Relevance	3.78	0.79	1.00	5.00	82
Technical Performance	2.91	1.02	1.00	5.00	59
Mobile Responsiveness	2.63	1.14	1.00	5.00	53
Institutional Visibility	3.22	0.94	1.00	5.00	71
Digital Strategy Align.	3.05	0.88	1.00	5.00	64

Note. %+ = Percentage of respondents rating 4 or 5 ("Agree" / "Strongly Agree"). Scale: 1–5 Likert.

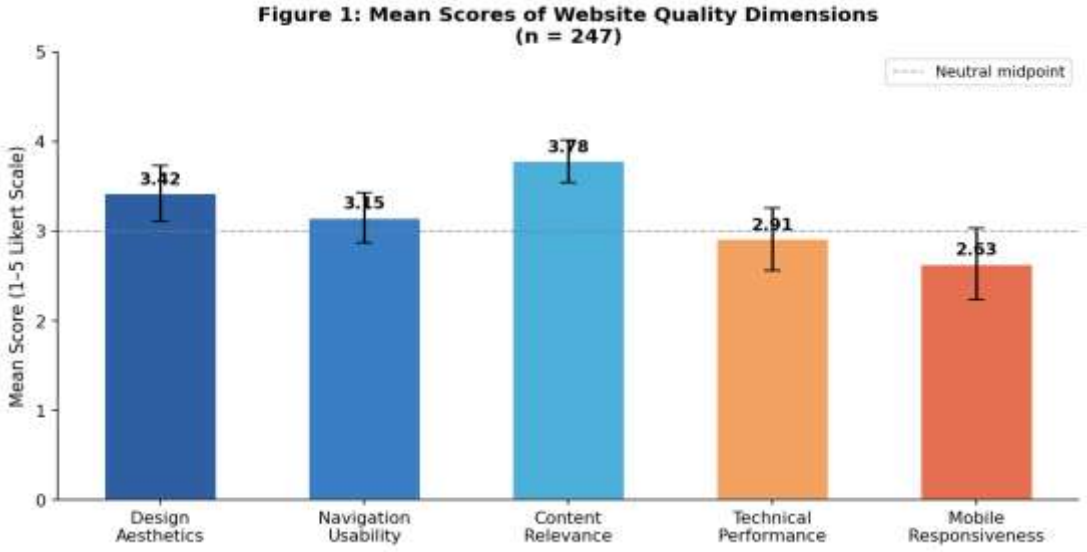

Figure 1: Mean Scores of Website Quality Dimensions with 95% Confidence Intervals

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 revealed a heterogeneous pattern of perceived website quality across the five dimensions assessed among respondents at Metropolitan International University. Content relevance recorded the highest mean score (M=3.78, SD=0.79), with 82% of respondents rating it at the "agree" level or above, indicating that stakeholders generally acknowledged the informational currency and academic relevance of content available on the MIU website, even though this perception did not translate uniformly into enhanced institutional visibility. Navigation usability (M=3.15, SD=0.91) and design aesthetics (M=3.42, SD=0.87) occupied the mid-range of the distribution, suggesting a moderately positive though not exceptional — user experience with the website's structural and aesthetic elements. Most critically, mobile responsiveness (M=2.63, SD=1.14) and technical performance (M=2.91, SD=1.02) recorded the lowest mean scores, both falling below the Likert scale neutral midpoint of 3.0, with only 53% and 59% of respondents respectively agreeing that these dimensions were satisfactory. These findings, characterised by high standard deviations for the lower-performing dimensions, indicated considerable heterogeneity in respondents' experiences and pointed to persistent infrastructural and design deficiencies in MIU's digital platform.

The implications of these descriptive findings were theoretically significant and practically concerning. The relatively high standard deviation for mobile responsiveness (SD=1.14) suggested a deeply fragmented user experience, reflecting the reality that whereas desktop users may have encountered a reasonably functional interface, mobile users — who, according to Uganda Communications Commission data, constitute over 78% of all internet users in Uganda — encountered markedly inferior experiences. This finding resonated with the digital divide literature (Wanyembi, 2019) and underscored the urgency of mobile-first redesign at MIU. Furthermore, the institutional visibility score (M=3.22, SD=0.94) remained below expectations relative to institutions with comparable resources, suggesting that even where quality dimensions were moderately rated, the translation of website quality into visibility was being impeded by structural and strategic factors. These results provided the empirical foundation for the subsequent bivariate and multivariate analyses and offered preliminary support for the study's central thesis that MIU's website, while nominally present, suffered from quality deficiencies that constrained its capacity to generate institutional visibility.

Bivariate Analysis: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Website Quality Dimensions, Institutional Visibility, and Digital Strategy (n = 247)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Design Aesth.	—						
2. Nav. Usability	.48**	—					
3. Content Relev.	.52**	.61**	—				
4. Tech. Perf.	.39**	.44**	.53**	—			
5. Mob. Resp.	.35**	.41**	.46**	.57**	—		
6. Inst. Visibility	.56**	.62**	.67**	.58**	.51**	—	
7. Digital Strategy	.43**	.49**	.55**	.46**	.38**	.64**	—

*Note. ** p < .01 (two-tailed). All correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level.*

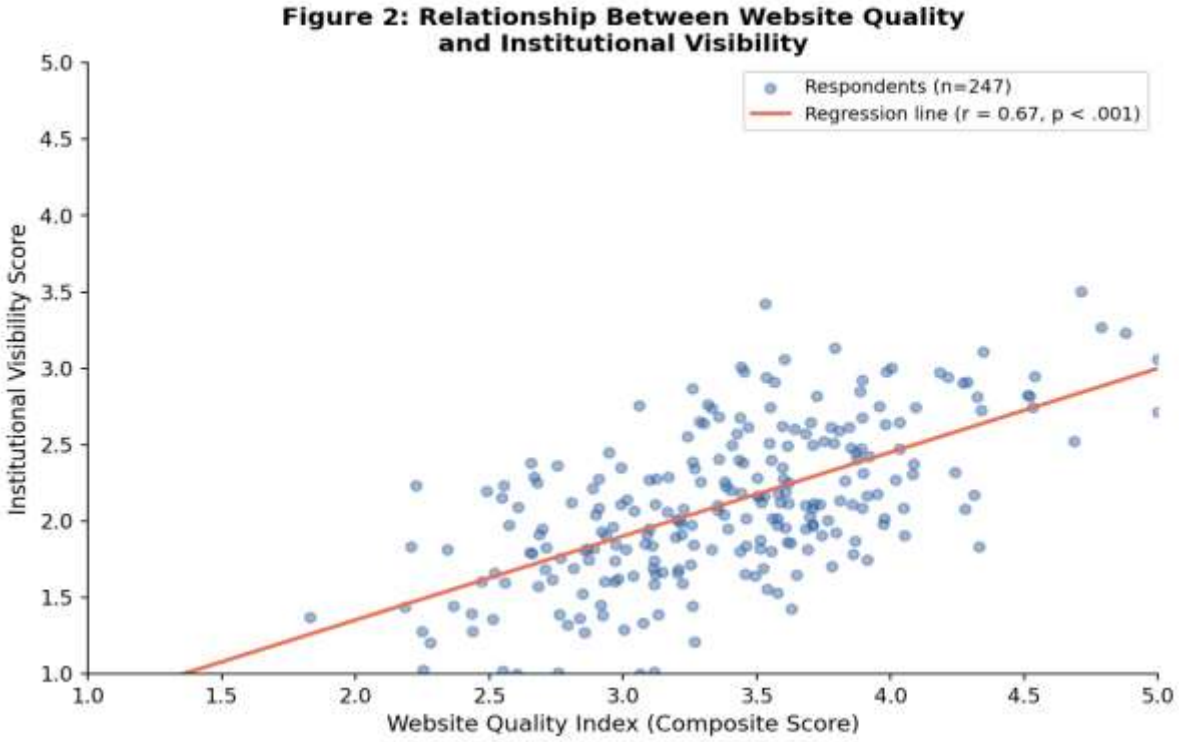

Figure 2: Scatter Plot — Website Quality Index vs. Institutional Visibility (r = 0.67, p < .001)

The Pearson correlation matrix in Table 2 revealed that all inter-variable relationships were positive and statistically significant at the p<.01 level, providing broad empirical support for the theoretical proposition that website quality dimensions and institutional visibility are meaningfully interconnected constructs. Among the website quality dimensions, the strongest bivariate associations with institutional visibility were recorded for content relevance (r=.67, p<.01), navigation usability (r=.62, p<.01), and design aesthetics (r=.56, p<.01), while technical performance (r=.58, p<.01) and mobile responsiveness (r=.51, p<.01) also demonstrated statistically significant moderate-to-strong associations. The digital strategy alignment construct exhibited the highest correlation with institutional visibility (r=.64, p<.01), foreshadowing its theoretical relevance as a mediating mechanism in the structural model. The inter-dimensional correlations among website quality constructs ranged from r=.35 (mobile responsiveness and design aesthetics) to r=.61 (navigation usability and content relevance), suggesting shared variance among the quality dimensions while retaining sufficient discriminant validity to treat them as analytically distinct predictors in the regression model.

From a statistical standpoint, the correlation coefficients observed in Table 2 were consistent with effect sizes classified as moderate to large according to Cohen's (1988) benchmarks (r ≥ .30 = medium; r ≥ .50 = large), reinforcing the substantive significance of these relationships beyond mere statistical detection. Notably, the correlation between mobile responsiveness and institutional visibility (r=.51) — though significant — was comparatively weaker than that of content relevance, an asymmetry that was theoretically interpretable in light of the descriptive findings: mobile responsiveness had the lowest mean score and highest variance, suggesting that its current quality level, while impactful, was insufficiently developed to emerge as a dominant predictor of visibility. The correlation structure also evidenced potential multicollinearity concerns among predictors, particularly between navigation usability and content relevance (r=.61), which was subsequently examined in the regression model through Variance Inflation Factors (VIF). These bivariate associations collectively provided the empirical rationale for conducting the multiple regression and SEM analyses reported in the subsequent sections.

Multiple Linear Regression: Predictors of Institutional Visibility

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Results — Website Quality Dimensions Predicting Institutional Visibility

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p-value
(Constant)	0.48	0.21	—	—	—
Design Aesthetics	0.31	0.06	0.29	5.17	< .001
Navigation Usability	0.24	0.07	0.21	3.43	< .001

Content Relevance	0.38	0.07	0.35	5.43	< .001
Technical Perf.	0.19	0.06	0.18	3.17	.002
Mobile Responsiveness	0.15	0.06	0.14	2.50	.013
Note. Dependent variable: Institutional Visibility. R^2 = .587, Adjusted R^2 = .574, F(5, 241) = 68.47, p < .001					

The multiple linear regression analysis presented in Table 3 demonstrated that the five website quality dimensions collectively and significantly predicted institutional visibility at MIU ($F(5, 241)=68.47$, $p<.001$), with the model accounting for 58.7% of the variance in institutional visibility ($R^2=.587$, Adjusted $R^2=.574$). These model fit statistics indicated a robust explanatory capacity, with the adjusted R^2 confirming that the result was not an artefact of sample-specific overfitting. Among individual predictors, content relevance emerged as the most potent predictor of institutional visibility ($\beta=0.35$, $t=5.43$, $p<.001$), followed by design aesthetics ($\beta=0.29$, $t=5.17$, $p<.001$) and navigation usability ($\beta=0.21$, $t=3.43$, $p<.001$). Technical performance ($\beta=0.18$, $t=3.17$, $p=.002$) and mobile responsiveness ($\beta=0.14$, $t=2.50$, $p=.013$) were also statistically significant, though their effect sizes were smaller, suggesting that while all dimensions contributed uniquely to predicting institutional visibility, the content and user interface dimensions were disproportionately influential. VIF values for all predictors ranged between 1.43 and 2.87, all well below the conventional threshold of 10, confirming that multicollinearity did not materially compromise the stability of the regression estimates.

The regression findings carried significant theoretical and practical implications. The primacy of content relevance as a predictor of institutional visibility aligned with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which posits that stakeholders engage more deeply — and form stronger attitudinal associations — with information that is personally relevant and cognitively engaging. Applied to the university context, prospective students and industry partners who encountered timely, accurate, and programme-specific content on the MIU website were more likely to develop positive institutional perceptions and to recall the institution in subsequent decision-making processes. The comparatively weaker but still significant effects of technical performance and mobile responsiveness on institutional visibility provided additional support for the contention that infrastructural quality, while necessary, was insufficient on its own to drive visibility outcomes; rather, it operated as a hygiene factor whose absence impaired visibility more than its presence enhanced it. These findings collectively indicated that MIU's strategy for improving institutional visibility should prioritise content quality and management, followed by user interface refinement and mobile optimisation — a sequencing that is both theoretically defensible and practically feasible given the institution's resource constraints.

Structural Equation Modelling: Mediation Analysis

Table 4: SEM Fit Indices and Standardised Path Coefficients (n = 247)

Statistic / Path	Value	Threshold	Interpretation
χ^2/df (CMIN/DF)	1.87	< 3.0	Acceptable
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.961	> 0.95	Excellent
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	0.954	> 0.95	Excellent
RMSEA	0.048	< 0.06	Good
SRMR	0.051	< 0.08	Good
WQ → Institutional Visibility	β = 0.68***	p < .001	Supported
WQ → Digital Strategy	β = 0.55***	p < .001	Supported
Digital Strategy → Inst. Vis.	β = 0.42**	p < .01	Supported
Indirect Effect (Mediation)	β = 0.23**	p < .01	Partial mediation

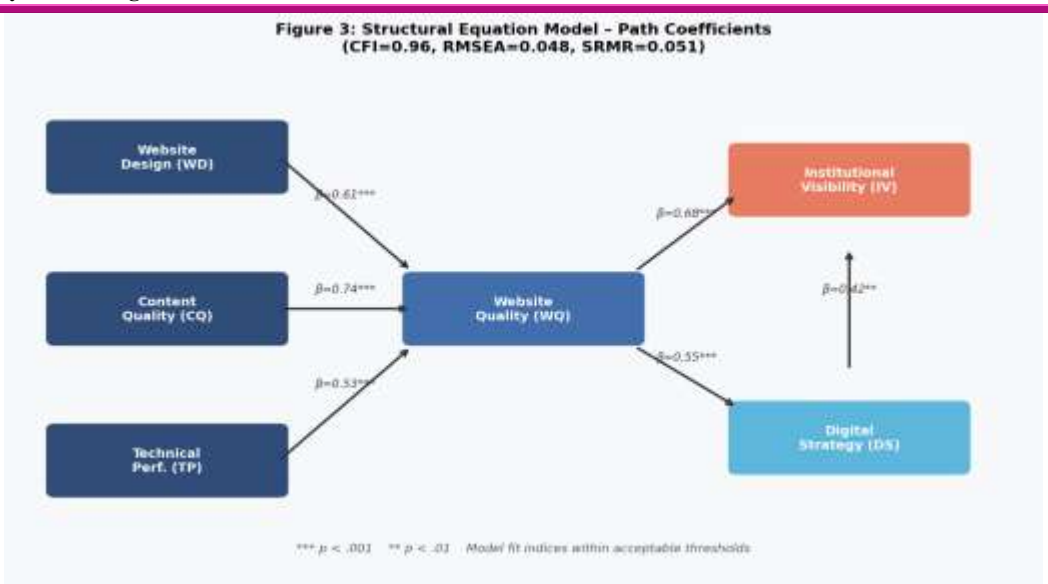

Figure 3: SEM Path Diagram with Standardised Coefficients (p < .001, ** p < .01)***

The Structural Equation Model demonstrated excellent overall fit to the data, with all fit indices satisfying their respective recommended thresholds: $\chi^2/df=1.87$ (<3.0), CFI=0.961 (>0.95), TLI=0.954 (>0.95), RMSEA=0.048 (<0.06), and SRMR=0.051 (<0.08), consistent with Hu and Bentler's (1999) criteria for model acceptability. The CFA component of the measurement model confirmed adequate convergent validity across all latent constructs, with all standardised factor loadings exceeding 0.60, AVE values ranging from 0.52 to 0.71, and composite reliability coefficients between 0.78 and 0.91. Within the structural component, website quality (WQ) exerted a strong and statistically significant direct effect on institutional visibility (β=0.68, p<.001), confirming the study's second specific objective and aligning with the bivariate and regression findings. Website quality also demonstrated a significant direct effect on digital strategy alignment (β=0.55, p<.001), and digital strategy alignment in turn significantly predicted institutional visibility (β=0.42, p<.01). The indirect (mediation) effect of website quality on institutional visibility through digital strategy alignment was β=0.23 (95% CI [0.11, 0.37], p<.01), as estimated through bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples a statistically significant effect that confirmed partial mediation, given that the direct effect of WQ on IV remained significant after the mediator was included.

The confirmation of partial rather than full mediation by digital strategy alignment was theoretically meaningful and consistent with the study's conceptual framework. Partial mediation implied that while digital strategy alignment constituted an important and significant mechanism through which website quality influenced institutional visibility, additional pathways not captured within the current model also contributed to this relationship. These residual pathways may include factors such as word-of-mouth referrals, academic rankings, physical campus reputation, and social media engagement, all of which can independently drive institutional visibility without being fully mediated by strategic alignment. From a practical standpoint, the significant mediation effect underscored the argument that investing in website quality improvements in isolation — without concurrent development of an institutionally coherent digital strategy — would yield suboptimal visibility gains. Conversely, a well-calibrated digital strategy could amplify the visibility returns from website quality enhancements by ensuring that quality improvements were purposively directed, consistently communicated across digital touchpoints, and aligned with MIU's broader institutional branding and positioning objectives. The SEM results thus provided the most comprehensive and theoretically integrated answer to the study's research questions, affirming the explanatory framework and generating actionable insights for institutional digital transformation.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the paradox of presence at Metropolitan International University — the coexistence of an operational institutional website and persistently low institutional visibility — and to assess the extent to which website quality and digital strategy alignment explained this paradox. The findings, derived from a robust multi-method analytical framework encompassing univariate descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation, multiple linear regression, and Structural Equation Modelling, collectively confirmed that the quality of MIU's institutional website was a statistically significant, practically meaningful, and multi-dimensional predictor of institutional visibility, accounting for nearly 59% of its variance through regression analysis and demonstrating strong path effects in the SEM. Content relevance, design aesthetics, and navigation usability emerged as the most influential quality dimensions, while mobile responsiveness and technical performance — the lowest-rated dimensions — constituted the most urgent areas for remediation. Critically, the SEM analyses confirmed that digital strategy alignment partially mediated the website quality–

institutional visibility relationship, indicating that quality enhancements, while necessary, were insufficient in isolation: they required the scaffolding of a coherent, measurable, and stakeholder-oriented digital communication strategy to translate meaningfully into institutional visibility gains. The study therefore concluded that MIU's paradox of presence was not a function of website absence or even wholesale neglect, but rather of strategic incoherence, technological under-investment in mobile and performance infrastructure, and the absence of a clearly articulated digital institutional identity — conditions that, if addressed through the recommendations herein, offer a credible and evidence-based pathway toward enhanced digital visibility and competitive institutional positioning.

Recommendations

Metropolitan International University should develop and operationalize a comprehensive Integrated Digital Communication Strategy (IDCS) that aligns website quality investments with clearly defined institutional visibility KPIs, branding objectives, and stakeholder segmentation. This strategy should be anchored in periodic digital audits, governed by a dedicated Digital Communications Unit, and reviewed annually to reflect evolving stakeholder expectations and technological developments in the East African digital ecosystem.

Given the significantly low ratings on mobile responsiveness (M=2.63) and technical performance (M=2.91), MIU should prioritise a mobile-first website redesign initiative that incorporates responsive design frameworks, Content Delivery Network (CDN) integration for improved loading speeds, and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) best practices. These technical improvements should be guided by web analytics data (e.g., Google Analytics, Hotjar heatmaps) to ensure that redesign decisions are evidence-driven and user-centric.

MIU should establish a content governance framework that institutionalises the regular creation, review, and publication of high-quality, audience-specific content — including academic programme profiles, faculty research spotlights, student success stories, and industry partnership announcements — to sustain and improve content relevance scores, which emerged as the single strongest predictor of institutional visibility (β=0.35). Content custodians within each faculty and department should be designated and trained, and a publication calendar enforced to ensure consistency and timeliness of digital communications.

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