

Journal of Management Sciences

Bridging Perception and Practice: A Qualitative Study of Service Marketing Effectiveness in Karachi's Business Schools

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Manuscript Information

Submission Date: June 24, 2025

Reviews Completed: July 9, 2025

Acceptance Date: July 14, 2025

Publication Date: July 16, 2025

Citation in APA Style:

Khan, S., Khan, S. A., Zainulabeydeen, Khan, H. H., & Hadi, Q. (2025). Bridging Perception and Practice: A Qualitative Study of Service Marketing Effectiveness in Karachi's Business Schools, *Journal of Management Sciences*, 12 (1), 28-45.





Bridging Perception and Practice: A Qualitative Study of Service Marketing Effectiveness in Karachi's Business Schools

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Abstract: In today's competitive academic landscape, business schools increasingly rely on university service marketing to attract and retain students. In Karachi, where market saturation and cultural factors influence educational choices, understanding the effectiveness of such strategies is vital. Despite its relevance, research on the practical implementation of service marketing within Pakistan's higher education sector remains limited. This study addresses that gap by examining how business schools in Karachi utilize service marketing and the challenges they face in doing so. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 17 stakeholders, including program managers, marketing directors, and public relations officers. Findings highlight key factors influencing marketing outcomes, including institutional identity, strategic alignment, and communication practices. The study offers practical implications for enhancing strategic planning and operational effectiveness in service marketing within business education.

Keywords: Service marketing, Higher education, Student retention, Marketing effectiveness, Business schools, Pakistan.

Introduction

Karachi, Pakistan's largest metropolitan city, is home to several prominent business schools that compete intensely to attract and retain prospective students. In this dynamic environment, university service marketing has emerged as a strategic tool for higher education institutions seeking to differentiate themselves and communicate value beyond academic credentials. Business schools in Karachi offer a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in management and administration, necessitating not only academic excellence but also a competitive edge in service delivery and branding.

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Higher education institutions today are not merely providers of academic degrees; they are service organizations that must market both educational quality and service quality. While academic quality encompasses the development of students' learning capabilities and intellectual growth, service quality includes the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative, physical, and student-centered services (Khan, Zaman, & Rais, 2022). Universities are increasingly adopting sustainable models akin to corporate growth strategies (Mubeen et al., 2021). The global expansion of universities is now closely linked to their reputation for delivering a holistic student experience that integrates both these dimensions (Mekic & Mekic, 2016).

In this context, a university's image is largely shaped by its service delivery. A strong brand image not only fosters trust and loyalty among students and alumni but also enhances institutional competitiveness. However, business schools are increasingly challenged by the need to adapt to an evolving educational marketplace, where conventional ideas of value creation are being redefined (Abu-Rumman & Qawasmeh, 2021). Marketing strategies must now reflect a broader understanding of student needs, institutional identity, and stakeholder expectations.

To remain competitive, universities must develop comprehensive marketing strategies that emphasize their unique value propositions. These strategies typically integrate elements of the marketing mix (7Ps)—product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and processes—which collectively communicate the tangible and intangible benefits of a university experience. From quality teaching and faculty expertise to facilities like libraries and laboratories, service marketing enables universities to position themselves effectively in the minds of prospective students.

Many institutions in Karachi have begun to apply marketing tools to enhance their brand identity and student engagement. However, their efforts often remain fragmented or under-researched. Although anecdotal evidence suggests that institutions differentiate themselves through faculty credentials, industry partnerships, and curriculum innovation, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on how effectively these strategies are being implemented within Karachi's business schools.

Despite the growing emphasis on service marketing in global higher education, there is a notable research gap in the context of developing countries, particularly in Pakistan. Prior studies (e.g., Nasib et al., 2022; Anane-Donkor & Dei, 2021) highlight the importance of tailored marketing in higher education but do not sufficiently address its localized application. Specifically, there is limited academic inquiry into the effectiveness of service marketing strategies used by business schools in Karachi, including the extent to which they utilize the full 7Ps framework.

Literature Review

Marketing of universities has become crucial with the growing competition among universities to attract and retain students. University service marketing concepts have emerged as an effective approach for marketing services, including higher education. Considering the current competitive environment, this literature review examines how service marketing concepts are utilized in marketing business schools in Karachi, Pakistan.

Marketing in the University

Universities have increasingly acknowledged the importance of implementing attractive strategies to get students' attention and remain competitive in the higher education market. "Several authors, including Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006), HE institutions are compelled to market themselves successfully. This requires managers to investigate how potential students make decisions and search for information. Consequently, researchers have undertaken studies to analyze the content of printed communications.

Universities and colleges should actively encourage their academic professionals to collaborate and share their research knowledge and expertise with businesses and industries to drive innovative advancements. They should also focus on promoting the outcomes of their research. Higher education institutions (HEIs) can seek quality assurance and accreditation from internationally recognized awarding organizations for their educational programs (Camilleri, 2020). The literature highlights the crucial role that marketing plays in both student recruitment and retention efforts within educational institutions.

The pandemic has altered perceptions of educational value and delivery (Hameed et al., 2021). Business schools' products as well as services high high-quality knowledge and experience share the researched Business schools foster an entrepreneurial mindset in students with the help of the facilities of top-notch education, a wide range of training alternatives, immersive industry projects, and interactive workshops designed to unleash their untapped potential.

Services in Higher Education

According to Kotler and Keller (2016), services are fundamentally distinct from products because they are intangible and involve actions or performances provided by one person to another. Other essential attributes besides tangibility differentiate products from services (Shah et al., 2021). These attributes include the inability to separate production and consumption, heterogeneity, and perishability. The increasing global competition has highlighted the crucial significance of high-quality education and the need for acquiring new skills in the contemporary information-driven society (Alani et al., 2015)

In Pakistan, many higher education institutions under the supervision of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) have begun implementing basic quality assurance (QA) systems to fulfill the criteria set by regulatory bodies. Quality assurance can be categorized into two types: external and internal, as defined by Alani et al., (2015).

This study addressed a research gap by examining the implementation of university service marketing concepts in the marketing strategies of business schools in Karachi. Its objective is to provide valuable insights into the current practices of limited marketing mix applied in university marketing, and identify the gap overall marketing mix needed to apply in business schools in Karachi. Moreover, Identifying Gaps Based on the economic condition of current business schools, must identify facing challenges. These gaps could be related to branding, communication, demand for business school's differentiation from competitors, or even program offerings. Furthermore, currently this research will focus on the existing knowledge in university service marketing and

help business schools enhance their marketing strategies for better student attraction and retention (Stukalina, 2019)

The survey of the economic report and the HEC website highlight the number of institutes in Pakistan. In Pakistan, both private universities and public universities are enrolled in HEC. In Pakistan, Higher Education Institutions number of institutions are registered. According to an economic survey and one of the best websites, HEC recognizes the total number of institutes in Pakistan.

Table 1: Overview of Higher Education Institutions in Pakistan

Academic Year	Total Universities in Pakistan	Total Students in Pakistan
2018–2019	218	1.86 million
2019–2020	218	1.96 million
2025 (Projected)	233	2.00 million

Note. Data includes projections for 2025.

Marketing Mix

In the context of university education, the marketing mix refers to a suite of controllable tools used by institutions to generate desired responses from target audiences regarding their academic offerings (Ivy, 2008). Traditionally comprising the four Ps—product, price, place, and promotion—this model has been extended to include three additional elements: physical evidence, participants, and process, forming the services marketing mix or 7Ps (Akroush, 2011). These additions reflect the unique characteristics of services, such as intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability, which distinguish them from tangible goods. Addressing both tangible and intangible aspects allows institutions to craft more effective marketing strategies tailored to the educational service environment. Gonda and Poór (2023) emphasized that this expanded mix, particularly when applied to enrollment-focused strategies, helps institutions enhance their reputation, attract prospective students, retain existing ones, and build sustainable relationships. Technological innovation such as FinTech has transformed service delivery models in the financial sector and offers implications for higher education institutions (Alshannag et al., 2025)

Product

An institution's service product strategy significantly shapes its market identity, positioning, and perceived value among prospective students. In the context of higher education, this strategy includes curriculum design, degree offerings, institutional reputation, and post-graduation placement opportunities—all of which influence student decision-making. Educational "products" may encompass formal degree programs, workshops, skill-enhancement modules, and unique branding linked to institutional legacy. A recent case study emphasized that the marketing mix in education must strategically highlight accessible programs, curricular strengths, and institutional prestige to cultivate a positive brand image and drive student enrollment (Ilyasa, 2025).

Price

The price of educational products and services has both an economic and a psychological component. Pricing at to HEI Pricing strategies for HEIs should be consistent with its mission, strategy and institutional priorities. These factors consist of market position, characteristics of target segments, and the level of investment

necessary for the demanding quality of educational delivery (DesJardins, Ahlburg & McCall, 2022).

Tuition plus fees for registration comprise a direct financial cost for student entry into university studies. These fees typically include expenses related to tuition, access to facilities, administrative services and student support. The arrangement and levels of fees charged differ greatly between institutions and programmes (Heller & Callender, 2020). HEI's also value price as an vital part of the marketing mix. So these are not just seen as cost being a measure of value - but are also considered the major income of the institution. Tuition fees are more and more serving as the main funding stream for academic services and infrastructure in universities in many countries, especially in contexts where state funding is ebbing away (Marcucci & Usher, 2023).

Psychologically, pricing in turn affects students' perceptions of institutional quality and prestige. Higher tuition rates occasionally signal higher quality or status, and lower fees may target the price sensitive segment but can also be seen as low value (Chapman et al., 2021). Indeed, in the end HEIs will have to find a balance between financial sustainability and accessibility, "calculating" both market-driven logics and social responsibility when determining prices (Jongbloed, 2020).

Place

Place In higher education marketing, "place" does not define the school's geographical location; it is the surroundings where educational services are delivered and consumed. The physical environment, which refers to campus design, facilities, and access, significantly influences students' perceptions and choices of university. According to Wilkins, Hazzam and Ireland (2022) the physical campus and facilities of a university have a significant impact on students' selection of a university, perceived quality of teaching and learning, and satisfaction. Campus facilities contribute significantly to the overall student experience, which ultimately contributes to enrollment decisions.

Moreover, Costa, and Steffgen, (2020) found students physical environment satisfaction has a direct influence on the students learning environment satisfaction. Those that have made upgrades to their campuses, including state-of-the art classrooms and upgraded facilities, saw jumps in student satisfaction and engagement. The classroom environment itself exerts significant impact. Research has documented that immediate environmental factors that influence thermal comfort, lighting and spatial organization can have an impact on student's comfort, performance, and well-being (Wargocki & Wyon, 2020). These are environmental conditions associated with effective learning processes which may affect student's academic achievements.

Promotion

Higher education promotion has matured into a dynamic strategy that fuses digital and traditional media to both recruit and retain students. Colleges and universities today use social channels, websites, email marketing and targeted campaigns to get in front of people. Social media such as Instagram and Twitter are growing ever more influential in engaging Gen Z and Millennials to enhance enrolment results (Harbi & Maqsood, 2022; Seow & Hussain, 2024).

The perception of the university is a crucial factor in determining students'

commitment to and satisfaction with the university. A positive institutional image results in satisfaction and retention, and a negative one may have a negative effect on potential applicants (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). The brand needs to be authentic and consistent to be engaging.

Personalizing promotion strategies is also important. Students have varying preferences and backgrounds, and so institutions need to segment their marketing messages (Mourad et al., 2011). Emphasizing specific scholarships or international learning experiences increases institutional relevance (Hung & Yen, 2022; Al-Dmour et al., 2024). Furthermore, continuous feedback processes and stories, particularly those told by alumni, fuel institutional trust and branding (Moogan, 2011). Understanding behavioral shifts during the pandemic is crucial to marketing strategy design in education (Manzoor et al., 2024)

Positive word of mouth

HEIs have a major influence in providing information on different facets of university education. Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication is crucial in the process, in terms of shaping perceptions about course availability, entry requirements, fees and career outcomes. The brand equity of a university has profound implications on these perceptions, as it is indicative of a university's overall quality or reputation and thereby it influences the choice behaviour of potential students (Mourad, Ennew & Kortam, 2011).

Trust appears to be an important factor in generating positive WOM, specifically in business schools. It is the driver of customer relationship management, the reason for loyalty and the motivation for positive WOM. When organizations provide high quality services, students' expectations are not only fulfilled, but most of the time even surpassed, which results in satisfaction. Happy students become promoters and spread the word around creating positive WOM for the institution (Siebörger, 2015). The "novelty" dimension Mwangi and Simon (2010) noted that higher education institutions provide a unique setting for the study of WOM because of the creation and transmission of knowledge and thus it attracts free publicity and word of mouth publicity.

Alumni Relationship

Alumni networks serve as vital platforms for students to maintain meaningful connections with their universities. These networks facilitate interactions with graduates who have navigated similar academic and professional paths, offering guidance and support to current students facing their own challenges. Engaged alumni often participate in mentorship programs, providing insights into career development and industry expectations, thereby enriching the student experience and fostering a supportive community.

The purpose of students to joining the alumni is regarded through the concept of internal branding orientation. According to this view, students' propensity to tap into alumni networks is determined by how deeply they feel a part of the campus environment and identify with its traditions and values. Amani (2022) revealed that internal branding has a highly significant effect on students' behavioral intention towards alumni activities, demonstrating the importance of building a strong sense of institutional identity during their time as students.

Additionally, mentorship initiatives in associations of alumni have been demonstrated to be a key factor in students' future development. Alumni mentors offer compelling career advice, inspiration, and connections for attainment of sustained career success. This strong career support and social network contribute to the holistic development of students as well as student persistence" (Christensen Institute, 2021).

Process

University marketing is the process of HEIs taking strategic measures and actions to promote academic programs, increase brand recognition and lure potential students. These may include tactics such as digital marketing and content initiatives and individualized communication showcasing what the institution does best (EducationDynamics, 2023).

The student experience, a core component of institutional success, is shaped by several interrelated factors. These include the quality and accessibility of faculty members, administrative support, physical infrastructure (such as classrooms and libraries), and the availability of academic resources like study materials and learning platforms. A comprehensive and student-centered environment significantly improves satisfaction and fosters academic success (Emily, Adams, & Donnelly, 2015).

Within this framework, "process" in a university context refers to the systematic design and implementation of actions and procedures that effectively meet the diverse needs and expectations of students. These processes include curriculum planning, feedback collection, issue resolution mechanisms, and student support services. A process-oriented institutional culture ensures consistency, accountability, and responsiveness, thereby enhancing institutional performance and student engagement (Akari Software, 2023; VTM NSS College, 2024). The FinTech-driven service enhancements in banking suggest parallels for improving student-facing operations in universities (Ahmed et al., 2024). Institutions that actively evaluate and refine their operational processes are better equipped to deliver high-quality education and retain their competitive edge in the global academic marketplace.

People

The transmission of cultural values within educational systems plays a pivotal role in fostering students' civic awareness and societal engagement. Educators are increasingly encouraged to integrate culturally responsive pedagogies that align with students' backgrounds, linguistic diversity, and social realities (Mpuangnan, 2025; Paschal, 2025). Such approaches not only affirm students' identities but also cultivate inclusive learning spaces where learners feel respected and empowered to contribute meaningfully to society. Culturally attentive engagement methods—such as cooperative learning, storytelling, and value-driven conversations—are proficiently used to improve socialization and intrinsic motivation of the diverse student groups.

Moreover, students' satisfaction and retention has been found to be significantly influenced by the constant interaction between faculty and students. Orientation programs, peer bonding, and transparency about faculty and staff can deconstruct the mystery of institutional behavior, which in turn promotes a sense of belonging for students (Consolacion, 2025; Cho, 2025). Such efforts prove vital for students in multicultural or transnational educational environments for whom cultural adaptations can be exacerbated through culturally distinct norm and communication styles. Cultural

responsiveness in faculty-student dynamics strengthens engagement (Amin et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, universities are also starting to view their educational offerings as service systems rather than fixed services. This shift in paradigm reflects the packaging of those services" digital platform, mentoring, language support, life skills learning—addressing the underlying needs of students (Tobing et al., 2025, Hughes, 2025). More Than an Educational Product These vibrant programs for education not only teach academic subject areas, but also enrich students' cultural knowledge and their potential to participate in society.

Influence of Faculty and Administrators Lastly, the importance of faculty and administrators in creating these environments cannot be overemphasized. Studies have shown that students' academic resilience and community engagement in Tertiary institutions have been influenced positively by faculty support and institutional leadership (Sinabubaraga & Oniye, 2025). Leadership innovation has been linked to improved institutional performance (Aziz & Arif, 2020). Furthermore, continued investment in excellent teaching, student care, and transparent communication practices has also been demonstrated to be indicators of better institutional reputation and improved student reuse (Miotto et al., 2020). Together, these elements serve as reminders that raising societal engagement of students is not happenstance, but rather a product of intentional, culturally embedded institutional design.

Physical Evidence

Physical evidence plays a critical role in shaping students' perceptions of higher education institutions, especially given the intangible nature of educational services. Tangible elements such as classroom design, building maintenance, library infrastructure, and lab facilities contribute significantly to forming first impressions and ongoing student satisfaction (Gamage et al., 2022). The appearance and functionality of these physical spaces not only affect learning outcomes but also communicate institutional values and quality standards (Yousaf et al., 2024).

Additionally, elements such as dress code, staff appearance and promotional material (e.g. brochures and university websites) act as tangible signals that support a university's brand identity (Sánchez-García & Martínez-Ruiz, 2023). These perceptible factors are especially powerful during the pre-enrollment period in shaping students expectations and decisions. For potential students who make decisions on education using campus tours and virtual representations, it places new focus on physical assets, which when well cared for and effectively portrayed, can elevate institutional attractiveness and perceived authenticity (Alzaidi & Gelaidan, 2023).

For graduate and professional education, the need for concrete evidence is greater; business schools, for example, use high-tech labs, conference rooms, and sophisticated architecture to send a message about the rigor and currency of their offerings (Nakhleh & Harb, 2024). The university's built habitat, therefore, goes from being the context of the student experience and the context of university marketing to a "constitutive element of that experience and marketing."

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative exploratory approach to examine the effectiveness of university service marketing in business schools located in Karachi. Different

methodological approaches influence how institutions measure service impact (Ali et al., 2022). The research investigates how marketing strategies are applied, the challenges institutions face, and how these efforts contribute to institutional branding and student engagement. A case study design was selected for its ability to provide in-depth insights into complex organizational practices. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility and depth in responses.

A total of 17 participants were purposively selected from a mix of public and private business schools in Karachi. These included Directors of Marketing and Communication (n = 10), Program Managers (n = 5), and Public Relations Officers (n = 2). Recruitment was ongoing until data saturation occurred, which is when no new themes emerged in the data from the subsequent interviews. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed, was validated by academic supervisors and was pilot tested to ensure the clarity and relevance. Interviews were 20–30 minutes in duration and audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The process of analysis was guided by a thematic approach, open, axial, and selective coding. Themes and patterns were described, compared, and interpreted using systematic coding and qualitative research best practices. This rigorous analytical process allowed for the extraction of meaningful insights into how business schools implement service marketing strategies, while also highlighting areas for strategic improvement.

Results and Findings

In this table, we have information about 12 universities in Karachi, all of which are officially registered with the Higher Education Commission (HEC). These universities' purpose-built campuses come equipped with various modern facilities, such as Quality education, multimedia rooms, computer labs, well Air conditioner libraries, playgrounds, air-conditioned classrooms, and spaces for memorization sessions. They also provide recreational areas and cafeterias for students' convenience. Moreover, internet access is readily available in some institutions, ensuring that students can effectively pursue their studies. All 12 universities have taken the step to establish their websites and official Facebook pages.

The participants in this study have varying levels of experience in the marketing department of these universities, Experiences from 5 to 18 years. These individuals Participate and hold positions as directors of marketing and communication, and public relationship officers, Program Manager within their respective institutions.

In the thematic analysis, initially, open codes were identified during the data analysis phase. These open codes, which represent key concepts or themes found within the data, were then systematically categorized under pattern codes. These pattern codes began to emerge as recurring themes, connecting and organizing the open codes into broader categories.

Table 2: Profile of Participating Business Schools (Anonymized)

University ID	Year of Est.	No. of Campuses	Nature	Respondents
University A	1995	6	For-Profit	1 Director of Marketing and Communication 1 Program Manager
University B	2000	3	For-Profit	1 Director of Marketing 1 Program Manager
University C	2010	1	For-Profit	1 Director of Marketing 1 Program Manager
University D	1998	1	For-Profit	1 Director of Marketing and Communication
University E	2014	1	For-Profit	1 Director of Marketing 1 Program Manager
University F	1998	1	For-Profit	1 Director of Marketing 1 Program Manager
University G	1885	1	Not-for-Profit	1 Public Relations Officer
University H	1999	3	For-Profit	1 Director of Marketing and Communication
University I	2007	1	For-Profit	1 Director of Marketing and Communication

Table 3 – Thematic Summary of University Service Marketing in Karachi

Theme	Codes	No of Universities	Coverage
Effective Marketing Strategies	• Multichannel Marketing • Social Media Marketing • Print Media • School & College Visits	12	100%
Effective Communication Practices	• Query Handling • Support Staff • Feedback Mechanisms • Timely Response	10	83%
Institutional Diversity & Opportunity	• Global Exposure • Professional Certifications • Guest Lectures • Research Opportunities	9	75%
Communication & Engagement	• Parent Involvement • Targeted Messaging • Industry Collaboration • Orientation Campaigns	11	92%
Learning Enrichments	• Extracurriculars • Case Studies • Ethical Education • Capstone Projects	10	83%
Competitive Admission Landscape	• Benchmarking • Academic Excellence • Rank-based Promotion	6	50%
Convenient Location & Infrastructure	• Location Access • Transport Facilities • Safety & Parking	8	67%
Positive Word of Mouth	• Alumni Advocacy • Parent Referrals • Retention Support	9	75%
Negative Word of Mouth	• Responsiveness Issues • Online Feedback Challenges	6	50%
Marketing Challenges	• Job Market Misalignment • Gen-Z Short-Term Focus • Herd Mentality	7	58%

Theme 1: Effective Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategies are becoming increasingly diversified in higher education institutions. Multichannel approaches, including social media, print, websites, and school visits, were reported by participants as standard practice. Private universities tend to favor digital platforms due to their appeal to younger generations such as Gen Z and Millennials. One respondent stated, “We design content for Instagram and LinkedIn based on weekly engagement metrics.” According to Yousaf et al., (2023), multichannel marketing boosts enrollment rates when tailored to segmented audiences. University websites were also seen as pivotal tools for student acquisition and engagement.

Theme 2: Communication Practices and Query Handling

Effective communication emerged as critical to student trust and engagement. Participants emphasized the role of institutional responsiveness, timely email replies, and the availability of live chats and webinars. “Our university runs weekly Zoom Q&A for admissions,” one marketing director mentioned. Literature supports this; Ahmed and Nisar (2024) found that response speed positively correlates with applicant satisfaction. Support staff training and query-resolution systems were also key enablers of service quality in university marketing. Effective communication during crises can foster institutional trust (Eneizan et al., 2020).

Theme 3: Institutional Diversity and Academic Opportunities

Institutions leverage global partnerships, guest lectures, professional certifications, and entrepreneurship programs to strengthen their brand. “We market our dual-degree programs with European partners as a USP,” one respondent shared. As Bukhari and Akram (2024) indicate, international linkages enhance perceived educational value and signal institutional credibility.

Theme 4: Targeted Messaging and Stakeholder Engagement

Tailored communication and direct involvement of parents in decision-making processes are considered effective tactics. Participant narratives emphasized messaging differentiation by income class and academic interest. “Our campaigns vary for A-minus class students versus scholarship candidates,” a communication officer explained. Ghayas, Ali and Shamsi (2019) emphasizes aligning branding strategies with student preferences to foster stronger recruitment outcomes. Institutions’ ethical positioning enhances brand loyalty (Kazi & Arif, 2019).

Theme 5: Enrichment through Learning and Extra-Curriculars

Business schools provide leadership programs, case-based learning, and extracurricular engagement to strengthen institutional value. “Our MBA students complete capstone projects with corporate partners,” said one participant. This supports findings by Khan and Rasheed (2023), who assert that such experiences improve both employability and university appeal.

Theme 6: Competitive Admission Landscape

Publicizing high application rates and low acceptance ratios is a strategic branding move. “We highlight our record-breaking admissions in marketing emails,” stated a marketing head. As per Esposito et al. (2025), highlighting selective admissions

improves institutional prestige and draws top-performing applicants.

Theme 7: Location and Infrastructure

Universities with centrally located campuses and well-maintained transport and parking facilities use this as a marketing asset. "Our city-center campus and shuttle service are frequently mentioned in parent feedback," one participant shared. This aligns with Gull (2024), who found infrastructural accessibility to be a key driver in student decision-making.

Theme 8: Positive Word-of-Mouth and Alumni Advocacy

Satisfied alumni and student testimonials are cited as vital tools in shaping brand image. "We track monthly word-of-mouth leads; they convert the fastest," explained one university official. Haliding et al., (2025) highlight that alumni engagement campaigns can significantly enhance institutional loyalty and referral rates.

Theme 9: Managing Negative Reputations

Participants raised concerns of online criticism and inadequate response times. "An email sent an hour late could become a Twitter rant," one manager cautioned. Xin et al. (2025) recommend the implementation of social listening tools by universities in order to control their digital reputation and reduce narrative risk.

Theme 10: Marketing Challenges

Challenges cited are Gen Z's short-term mindset, herd mentality, and labor-market mismatches. "Parents are looking for traditional degrees; Gen Z wants startups," one respondent said. According to Minhas et al., (2025), matching support, mentoring, and real-world exposure with career options is the key to maintaining a place in the ever more competitive market for the labor of academics.

Implications of Results

Service marketing can be used in business schools for improved market positioning and competitive advantage. This is important for business schools to know as they have to design their marketing activities specifically for the expectations of their target audience. The study emphasises the significance of adapting the marketing mix to fit with the specific demands of local markets as a means to improve student satisfaction.

Secondly, this research highlights the significance of innovative and differentiating approaches in the construction of the programmes and services value proposition. This knowledge can be critical for business schools that want to set themselves apart in a crowded marketplace.

Limitation

The assessment of the effectiveness of university service marketing in business schools in Karachi is not devoid of constraints. First the study has small spatial coverage as this is only limited to the city of Karachi. This limitation has implications for the

generalization of the results. Moreover, the research is time-specific and lacks the ability to investigate changes over time and to whether or not the effectiveness of university service marketing has declined over time. In addition, the study has been limited only to the residents of Karachi, ignoring the other perspectives which might exist outside Karachi.

Another major limitation is that there is not too much literature about the topic review and it reflects the gap in existing literature, it will affect to the Level of theoretical Foundation of article review private education. It is important to acknowledge and accept these limitations in order to provide detailed understanding as regards to the limitations and the implications of the study.

Recommendation

It is a widely overspread belief that individuals tend to give positive and negative endorsements to others after they receive positive and negative endorsements themselves (Burt, 1999). Leadership approaches also affect organizational branding and student perceptions (Arif, Isa, & Mustapha, 2023). Proactively manage the reputation of the institute and promote positive word-of-mouth, cultivate a sense of commitment among the students. Create a feedback culture of giving and receiving responsive and transparent feedback, and turning negative feedback into improvement opportunities (Vadsariya & Ghayas, 2024). Impact of word of mouth on university reputation, consumers may be able to close their eyes but can't close their ears. Because of this word of mouth, we went further into the role of university service marketing's effectiveness in business schools in Karachi.

Conclusion

Finally, this study has provided an insight into the utility of service marketing practices in Karachi's business schools. Through the exploration of a number of themes and their practical implications, the paper provides useful support in the areas of strategic positioning, operational good practice, and the creation of a recognizable institutional positioning. It gives a lot of insight into what works in marketing; and what doesn't. Given its implications towards strengthening marketing strategies aimed at better engaging the audience and the prospects of gaining a competitive advantage in the higher education industry (education sector), the findings of this research have the ability to influence not just business schools in Karachi, in its entirety universities across the board wherever they might be located.

The study also highlights the need to devise a unique and differentiated strategy to generate a distinctive value proposition for business schools. The successful institutions implemented these strategies to differentiate their product offerings, communicate with their target audience and develop a rich and distinct brand image.

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