

# Exploring Post-Epidemic Marketing Strategies in Higher Education: A Synthesis of Recent Research and Implications

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## Abstract:

The increasing number of competitors, commodification of educational value and globalization has pressured those providers to adapt different marketing strategies. This study aimed to explore the marketing activities using 7Ps framework and six-phase thematic analysis to understand what activities influence the post-pandemic enrollment decisions in HEIs. In this regard, this paper uses the six-phase thematic analysis to review the discussion session from the 11 articles published between 2022 and 2024. This paper shows the shift of marketing activities from program, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence to post-pandemic practice including managerial practices, facilities, financial considerations, programs' feature, branding and media exposures, These are aligning with student needs, program quality and affordability. This study concludes that HEIs must balance both traditional and post-pandemic strategies to enhance students' experience.

**Key Words:** Marketing activities, higher education, student enrollment, post-pandemic.

## 1. Introduction:

Education in the modern context viewed and offered as a service product offered to its students as they are the consumers of education provider. The increasing number of competitors, commodification of educational value and globalization has pressured those providers to adapt different marketing strategies (Kasimbara et al., 2024; Subedi, 2019). In this context, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offer their programs to influence student's enrollment decision in a systematic way by promising to fulfill prospect students' needs and desires. In this case, HEIs have implemented the educational marketing mix activities to position their offerings strategically in the market. This influence the students' enrollment decision when they search more information regarding their desired program (Mahajan and Golahit, 2019; Tukur et al., 2019). This involves the placement of different marketing activities in a thematic framework such as product (program), price, promotion, place, process, people, and physical evidence, collectively referred to as 7Ps to draw desired responses from the prospects (Kotler et al., 2016, as cited in Pardiyono et al., 2022). Many studies have concluded that the 7P's has been a key approach to align with other strategies and increase enrollment in HEIs for a long time (Pokhrel et al., 2018). Meanwhile, HEIs and their prospect students have faced pandemic consequences. In this situation, there are limited studies stated whether the same marketing activities were practiced as before pandemic or it has changed during and after crisis. In this

context, this paper is aimed to address raised concern on what marketing activities are being discussed in the post-pandemic articles that influenced HEI's enrollment in the recent years. This paper review pre-pandemic articles through 7Ps framework and then thematically analyze the discussion sections of the articles between 2022 and 2024.

Filip (2012) defines marketing mix as the strategic blend of activities employed by leaders to elicit desired responses from target markets, originating in the 1960s. It works effectively to offer products and services to their specific market segments, traditionally comprising the 4Ps framework (product, price, place, and promotion), expanded in the 1980s after including 3Ps from service sector (people, process, and physical evidence). In this regard, it is evolved with Kotler and Fox revision for education sector by replacing product with program concept. This became an important strategy of leadership and marketing of HEIs in recent the years to offer and influence the student's enrollment choice (Al-Fattal and Ayoubi, 2013; Chawla, 2013; Filip, 2012; Goi, 2009; Ng and Forbes, 2009; Tukur et al., 2019).

Technological advancements in higher education, coupled with growing awareness among parents and students, have made it more challenging for HE institutions to influence enrollment decisions (Subedi, 2019). In higher education, Chawla (2013) stated that students primarily search

more information regarding their desired program. They look for program's features, quality, degree awarded and its benefits, program curricula, brand names, placement facilities, grading given and many more.

Tuition fees (Kwang, 2019), admission and examination fees (Chawla, 2013), discounts and scholarships (Pokhrel et al., 2018), flexibilities in payments, efforts and costs for transportation and living nearby, opportunities for getting up and works (Sabir et al., 2013). In this context, HEI leaders seem to convince students that the prices offered are rational and fair enough in terms of quality, values, and facilities (Chawla, 2013).

Easy accessibility to the study site whether in physical classroom or in online modes of delivery, site environment and supporting facilities, accessing road, transportation facility, parking for student's vehicle, and distance from one classroom to another place including lab, canteen or restrooms are other major concerns (Al-Fattal and Ayoubi, 2013; Chawla, 2013; Pokhrel et al., 2018).

Higher Education leaders often offer their program through different promotional activities to communicate, inform and influence their prospects. They develop insights from students' desires, and create limited proposals that are realistically achievable (Ng and Forbes, 2009). Pokhrel et al. (2018) found that many students were influenced by their friends, family and relatives for their program choice. In addition, many other prospects followed the social media, newspapers, college websites, educational events and media such as TV, radio, magazines and word of mouth (Chawla, 2013) such as reference from current students and alumni.

Ng and Forbes (2009) proposed teachers, administrators, support staff and students as People-pillars in educational marketing. Students want to know more about other human pillars, their profile and performance (Chawla, 2013; Goi, 2009; Mahajan and Golahit, 2019; Pokhrel et al., 2018; Tukur et al., 2019). They were significantly influenced with how such human pillar acted.

Educational materials, facilities for teaching learning, accommodations, and recreational activities has influence on enrollment decision (Chawla, 2013; Ng and Forbes, 2009; Pokhrel et al., 2018). Moreover, structure, design, visual appearance, functionality, layout and surrounding contexts of the college premises, buildings, playing area, and classrooms influential. Furthermore, uniforms, publications such as annual reports, calendars, diaries, magazine, and visiting cards significantly influenced prospects. In addition, few students also searched for nearby facilities such as hospitals, banks, offices, and stores.

Higher Education leaders influence their prospect through how they carryout teaching learning process. It has been a mutual relationship between teachers and students where teacher became guide, supporter, facilitator and mentor for the students (Subedi, 2019). They go beyond contemporary style and focus on skills development such as presentation, problem solving and logical thinking.

Moreover, college leaders also highlights on student's performance evaluation processes which now has based on formative assessment. Therefore, such college leaders influence students by explaining how they carry out case studies, projects and research papers to develop the specialist human resource. Moreover, Ng and Forbes (2009) claimed that many students sought information about socialization and administrative processes, and that higher education leaders had to respond.

Hedström and Ylikoski (2014) explain that decision makers have incomplete information for their rational choice. In this context, student's choice for the program offer is a social phenomenon and were not fully informed. This creates an opportunity for HEI leaders to rationally choose marketing activities and guide such potential enrolments. However, a crucial gap exists in our understanding of what marketing activities are in use and influencing the aftermath enrollment season of the COVID-19 led pandemic. To address this gap, this study aims to analyze recently published articles.

## 2. Materials And Methods:

This qualitative review studies what marketing activities were discussed in the post-pandemic articles published between 2022 and 2024 to influence the enrollment in HEIs. This study reviews the discussion section of the articles because of its richness of data having findings, interpretations, and implications. In this study, articles were freely accessed and downloaded from online platform. This includes Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Academia while focusing on articles published between 2022 and 2024 with relevant abstracts. The search terms combined higher education, marketing mix, college choice, and enrollment decisions. Citation and reference of good articles opened links for other articles. In this regard, purposefully 11 articles were selected for review, justified by the principle of data saturation and ensures that core themes and patterns are adequately captured without redundancy. A limitation of this review is the potential effect of analysis time on the generalizability of findings. In addition, the quality and range of published articles identified may limit the generalizability of the results.

This article uses the six-phase framework of the thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In its first phase of familiarization, the discussion section of the selected articles were taken as transcribed data and thoroughly reviewed. This phase with intense repeated reading of the data supports to gain overall insights and then identifying initial patterns.

In the second phase of generating initial codes, data were coded line-by-line as relevant to the research question.

At this point, initial coding with the help of Microsoft Excel software captured the marketing activities manually which provides foundation for further analysis. Third phase involves identifying themes through its data pattern. In this phase, the initial codes were reviewed and categorized systematically into emerging themes. This involves refining and regrouping of codes to accurately

reflect the emerging patterns.

In the fourth phase of reviewing, the identified themes were further refined, and then named for clarity, consistency, and coherence. The entire data set was reviewed to confirm that themes accurately captured the findings. Furthermore, themes with limited supporting data were merged with appropriate theme. The fifth phase is about defining and naming the theme. At this phase, themes were defined and named ensuring accurate data representation. Moreover, each theme received an abbreviated and descriptive name such as 'facilities', and 'management practice's. Finally, the findings were written clearly and concisely at sixth phase. This report writing phase emphasizes on marketing activities thematically that were implemented by HEIs to influence student's enrollment decision in the post-pandemic years. In this regard, this six-phase thematic analysis is a comprehensive and rigorous approach to identify key themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) through studying HEI's influential marketing.

## Findings:

### Management Practices:

HEIs are planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling effective post-pandemic marketing strategies in higher education (Kasimbara et al., 2024). In this connection, analysts gained valuable insights into student behaviors and preferences for increasing enrollment rates (Yan et al., 2024). In order to attract perspective students and improve service quality in the higher education institutions, it is necessary to address marketing mix elements including product quality, affordability, strategic location, promotional activities, skilled human resources, efficient processes, and adequate infrastructure (Kasimbara et al., 2024; Pardiyono et al., 2022). Moreover, mentoring lecturers, supportive department heads, attentive campus staff, helpful library staff, and friendly registration officers were identified as highly influential (Pardiyono et al., 2022). In this regards, division of their task properly as well as supervisory activities while implementing marketing plans and continuous evaluation for improvement ensures marketing effectiveness (Kasimbara et al., 2024).

### Facilities:

Students' desires for engagement other than educational program such as extracurricular facilities including athletics and sports found influential (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024). Campus attractiveness, location, size, and cultural diversity, as well as valuing accessibility, proximity and transportation availability to campus, its facilities and other accommodation, are essential for enhancing the overall decision (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024; Pardiyono et al., 2022; Rabenu and Shkoler, 2022; Yan et al., 2024). Moreover, online study scope and facilities, advanced classrooms, labs and libraries were found to have a high influence while making enrollment decisions (Gurung et al., 2022; Pardiyono et al., 2022; Mahajan and Patil, 2023; Rabenu and Shkoler, 2022; Yan et al., 2024). Meanwhile,

there was limited influence observed for safety and security measures among prospect enrollees. Moreover they were focused on choosing local and nearby educational options (Mahajan and Patil, 2023).

### Financial Considerations:

Costs related factors including admission and regular tuitions fees have influence over the enrollment decisions. Moreover, financial support and scholarship ensures wider access to higher education and make accessible to underrepresented and economically disadvantaged groups (Gurung et al., 2022; Rabenu and Shkoler, 2022; Yan et al., 2024). The provision of scholarships from different sources, including governments, institutions and policies has a significant impact on enrollment decisions. It reduces the cost of education and provides financial aid (Zhou and Alam, 2024) to the perspective students. Furthermore, such pricing and financial considerations influence post-pandemic decisions (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024; Gurung et al., 2022; Hung and Yen, 2022; Pardiyono et al., 2022; Rabenu and Shkoler, 2022; Yan et al., 2024; Zhou and Alam, 2024).

### Program Features:

Admissions requirements, such as language proficiency standards has influences on enrollment choices. For example, many non-native English speakers choose local subjects or program (Zhou and Alam, 2024). In this regard, multiple and diverse academic program offers play an important role in shaping student preferences, emphasizing the need for robust curriculum offerings (Gurung et al., 2022). Effective curriculum delivery and adaptive instructional approaches, especially through hybrid modes positively influences sustainability of higher education in pandemic scenarios (Mahajan and Patil, 2023). Students are also highly influenced by teaching quality and career outcomes perception, such as future employment prospects and graduate employment rates (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024; Gurung et al., 2022; Le et al., 2022). Furthermore, program with quality of academic offerings, its reputation and extracurricular opportunities, have a major impact on enrollment decisions (Pardiyono et al., 2022; Rabenu and Shkoler, 2022). Perceived benefits of educational investment relative to costs among different student groups (Mahajan and Patil, 2023) and addressing client needs beyond enrollment, ensuring a comprehensive educational experience (Hung and Yen, 2022).

### Branding:

Efforts to establish alliances with local to global companies and academic institutions expand outreach and attract students from diverse backgrounds (Kasimbara et al., 2024; Zhou and Alam, 2024). Effective branding and strategic communication attract those students (Yan et al., 2024) while increasing the reputation of such institutions and emphasizing global visibility play an important role in attracting international students as well (Zhou and Alam, 2024). The reputation and

image of institutions has a more influence on admissions decisions (Mahajan and Patil, 2023). Strategies based on international experience provide better educational services while maintaining student satisfaction and loyalty (Hung and Yen, 2022).

#### Media-exposure:

E-exposure on social media and digital platforms act as an important enrollment tool, especially among the younger generation, which urges higher education institutions to adapt and leverage these elements in their admission efforts (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024; Hung and Yen, 2022; Yan et al., 2024). In addition to the use of innovative marketing strategies, digital and advertising technologies, participation in traditional fairs, taking advice from friends, parents, teachers, and mentors remain decisively influential (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024; Ley et al., 2023). There have a greater impact by increasing brand perception including exposure on both print and social media (Elpishah et al., 2023; Kasimbara et al., 2024).

### 3. Results And Discussion:

Education has increasingly transformed into a service product, with higher education institutions adopting marketing strategies to attract students (Kasimbara et al., 2024; Subedi, 2019). To meet the evolving needs and expectations of students, institutions strategically employ elements of the marketing mix, including product (program), price, place, promotion, process, people, and physical evidence (Kotler et al., 2016, as cited in Pardiyo et al., 2022). Institutions focus on developing and offering programs that resonate with students' interests and career aspirations (Al-Fattal and Ayoubi, 2013; Chawla, 2013). They emphasize program features, quality, and relevance to differentiate themselves in the market (Ng and Forbes, 2009; Tukur et al., 2019). Tuition fees, scholarships, and financial aid significantly impact students' enrollment decisions (Kwang, 2019; Rabenu and Shkoler, 2022). Institutions strive to communicate the value and affordability of their programs to prospective students (Chawla, 2013).

Accessibility, campus environment, and facilities influence students' perceptions of institutions (Al-Fattal and Ayoubi, 2013; Pokhrel et al., 2018). Institutions invest in enhancing physical facilities and online learning environments to cater to diverse student needs (Gurung et al., 2022; Rabenu and Shkoler, 2022). Institutions utilize various promotional activities to communicate their offerings and values to prospective students (Ng and Forbes, 2009; Pokhrel et al., 2018). Strategic branding efforts enhance institutional visibility and reputation (Yan et al., 2024; Zhou and Alam, 2024). Positive interactions with faculty, staff, and peers influence students' perceptions of institutions (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024; Chawla, 2013). Institutions leverage traditional and digital media channels to engage with prospective students (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024; Hung and Yen, 2022).

### 4. Conclusion:

The COVID-19 pandemic had a transformative impact on the higher education, imposing a review of marketing strategies. Recent studies confirm the continued relevance of the 7Ps marketing mix in influencing student enrollment decisions, with more emphasis on offering program, price, and promotion along with other place, people, process and physical evidence related activities (Kasimbara et al., 2024; Mahajan and Golahit, 2019; Pardiyo et al., 2022; Pokhrel et al., 2018; Subedi, 2019). However, the pandemic has also stressed the growing influence of online learning opportunities, digital marketing channels, institutional branding and a focus on student's well-being. HEIs need to balance both traditional marketing strategies along with post pandemic approaches such as digitalization, financial assistance, and campus facilities (Gurung et al., 2022; Mahajan and Patil, 2023; Zhou and Alam, 2024). Finally, this study contributes to the HEI domain by providing its findings on what marketing activities are being practiced to address difficulties in student enrollment after the pandemic.

#### Implications:

The findings of this study offer many implications for HEIs providers who want to improve their marketing approaches and number of enrollment. In order to effectively draw in prospective students, colleges should first give priority to creating programs that are aligning with the students' interests and professional ambitions (Gurung et al., 2022; Tukur et al., 2019). They need to provide financial assistance and scholarships can increase access to higher education, especially for students from low-income backgrounds (Rabenu and Shkoler, 2022; Zhou and Alam, 2024).

Moreover, upgrading on-campus and on-line learning settings, use of social media, and digital marketing tools can raise student's satisfaction, experience and perception toward HEIs and offered program (Baliyan and Mokoena, 2024; Gurung et al., 2022; Hung and Yen, 2022; Mahajan and Patil, 2023). HEIs need to focus on their strategic branding initiatives (Kasimbara et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2024). Active and strong engagement between prospect students, faculties, staffs, and peers have more impact on their enrollment decisions and HEI's organizational culture (Ng and Forbes, 2009; Chawla, 2013). Finally, policymaker, universities and HEIs associations can improve their policies and services toward more student friendly.

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### 6. Completing Interest:

The authors confirm that they have no competing interests to declare.

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