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Exploring How School Marketing Efforts Influence Enrollment Intention: A Moderated Mediation Analysis of School Image and Parental SES

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Abstract: This paper will investigate the impact of school marketing activities on student enrollment intention by investigating the mediating effect of school image and the moderating effect of parental socioeconomic status (SES). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed in SmartPLS 4 to test the moderated and direct mediation of the model. The findings showed that the marketing mix has a strong positive effect on school image (b = 0.875), which has a significant positive effect on enrollment intention (b = 0.303). The total model was found to highly explain school image and enrollment intention, 76.6 and 79.4 percent, respectively. The moderating impact of SES was, however, statistically insignificant, meaning that there is no statistical difference in the way parental decisions are affected by marketing in different income groups. This work builds upon the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by incorporating the socioeconomic context into the education marketing framework that offers the theoretical component and practical recommendations of how schools can maximize image-based enrollment decisions, based on inclusive and value-based marketing practices.

Keywords: Marketing Mix, School Image, Enrollment Intention, Parental Socioeconomic Status, Education Marketing, PLS-SEM, Theory of Planned Behavior

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Introduction

Within the sphere of competition of the question of private schooling, the schools turn more towards strategic marketing aimed at shaping the intention of parents and students to enter the school. With the emergence of educational institutions that adopt the market-oriented approach to administration by abandoning the traditional methods, marketing mix elements in promotion, people, process, and physical evidence have become significant in activities to create perceptions of quality and trust (Kwok et al., 2020). These marketing policies do not only provide a channel to convey institutional strengths but also creates a positive school image, which will be an intermediating variable between marketing activities and parental choices. But even the effects of these activities are not evenly distributed; higher-income parents are more oriented to academic reputation and lower-income groups are more oriented toward affordability and inclusiveness due to moderating factors of parental socioeconomic status (SES) (Akiri, 2014; Wilkins & Huisman, 2021). In this respect, the discussion of how marketing efforts in the schools can be transformed into enrollment behavior in terms of the image formation and socioeconomic differentiation would be of interest to the educational managers aiming to make their institutions more appealing, particularly in the emerging

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markets where the competition between institutions that are privately owned is gaining momentum (Li et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022).

The education sector has become a very competitive service offering industry where the institutions have no choice but to strike a balance between academic merits and strategic marketing to appeal and retain the student. In developed and developing societies, higher education institutions and private schools are becoming almost business-like enterprises in the quest to remain in business and have a growing population of students (Wilkins & Huisman, 2021; Pardiyono et al., 2022). This competition has been enhanced by globalization of education, digital shift and parental awareness and became an additional factor why schools have to consider the aspects of social media marketing, digital branding and experiential communication in their outreach tactics (; Li et al., 2021). In addition, the online interaction medium and hybrid learning that has been swiftly adopted due to the post-pandemic educational setting has forced schools to redefine their market positioning with easy, trusting, and value-focused communication (Langendorfer , 2009; Perera et al., 2022). This has led to a situation where education industry has ceased to be considered as a purely public service but as a vibrant market system wherein good marketing and institutional image building has become key success factors in enrolment.

Literature Review

The school marketing efforts (SME) construct describes the sources of the strategies and operational steps applied by educational facilities to appeal to, contact and keep potential students and their families. Using corporate-style marketing practices is becoming popular in the marketing community based on the principles of the marketing mix (7Ps) product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence schools in order to improve their visibility and differentiation (Kwok et al., 2020;). Marketing campaigns in academic institutions involve brand promotion using social media, open days, testimonials of alumni, and quality demonstrations of services that cumulatively create the parents perception of institutional value (Wong et al., 2022; Akiri, 2014). Research in the field of marketing in higher education shows that proper exploitation of online platforms does not only enhance interest, but also develops a perspective on credibility and the quality of the provided education among the stakeholders (Li et al., 2021; Park & Namkung, 2022). Accordingly, SME is a multidimensional force that has an effect on tangible (infrastructure, curriculum innovation) and intangible (trust, reputation) aspects of school choice upon which enrollment-related decisions are based.

What is needed to supplement this is the construct of school image (SI) a perceptual and attitudinal assessment of how parents and students perceive the reputation, reliability, and educational quality of a school is. School image is an intermediary between the marketing inputs and behavioral intentions that convert promotional exposure into the psychological assurance and loyalty (Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022). The success in sharing a vision, the quality of faculty, and values at schools leads to the parents being more emotionally and cognitively connected to a school (Wilkins & Huisman, 2021). Nevertheless, the socioeconomic status (SES) of parents also plays an important role in forming this perception by defining expectations, the factor of affordability, and access to information (Nur et al., 2019). The more SES group could be prestige and international standard-oriented and the lower SES group could be affordability and inclusivity-oriented, thus balancing the relationship of school image enrollment intention. The above constructs, collectively, combine behavioral, perception contingents, and contextual facets, which form a holistic basis on analyzing the survey of enrollment results brought about by school marketing.

Theoretical Framework
Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The research will mainly be based on Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which includes attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, which work together to determine the intention of an individual to carry out a given behavior. The TPB within the education marketing context is rich in that it gives a good explanation of how parents develop an enrollment intention because of their impressions of the schools marketing intentions and credibility. Promotion, communication, and service quality in schools are some of the marketing activities that influence the attitudinal beliefs that the institutions are good and worth trusting and subsequently improve parents in their positive attitudes towards enrolling their children (Li et al., 2021; Al Maalouf et al., 2024). In the same manner, the perceived

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legitimacy of the school is supported by subjective norms, including those provided by peers or social networks, whereas the perceived control, including being affordable and accessible, helps parents in making the ultimate decision about enrolling (Kwok et al., 2020;).

Using TPB in this model, school image is a psychological mediator which alters the marketing induced attitudes into tangible enrollment intentions. The presence of a positive school image enhances the attitude intention relationship with the fact that when parents hold the school as reputable and value oriented, attitude intentions are more likely to translate to an action. The moderating impact of parental socioeconomic status (SES) is consistent with the fact that the orientation of the TPB on control beliefs suggests that parents associated with higher levels of socioeconomic status will have more autonomy and resource access, creating the stance that their marketing persuasion will not constitute a significant factor in influencing their attitudes and intentions, as compared to parents with lower socioeconomic status (Wong et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022). Therefore, TPB is a highly valid model capable of incorporating all three elements of cognitive, social and contextual elements but provides a sound reasoning of how school marketing initiatives can alter enrolment intentions due to perceived image and social economic differentiation.

Supporting and Negating Views

The literature discussing the effectiveness of school marketing activities in influencing the parental enrollment intentions also offers the supporting view and the opposite view. Pro-side arguments underscore the fact that properly developed marketing plans go a long way in improving school image and admissions through trust cultivation, publicity and emotional appeal to the target groups. Research has found that the applications of the integrated marketing mixes, especially, the dimensions of promotion, people, and process, effectively increase the perceived institutional credibility and push the decision-making behavior of the parents (Kwok et al., 2020;). It is also discovered that digital and social media marketing contributes to engagement and loyalty towards the brand and helps schools to express their educational values and achievements more convincingly (Li et al., 2021; 2022 et al., 2022). Moreover, studies on service and education marketing prove that positive school image is an intermediary between promotional activities and the behavior change in the form of attitudes and enrollment behavior, turning exposure to promotional activity into positive perceptions, and enrollments (Widodo & Maylina, 2022; Wong et al., 2022). Negating views, on the other hand, are that marketing in education frequently has a lopsided or superficial influence, especially when marketing and claims of quality, as well as when service delivery by the institution does not correspond with the propositions. According to some researchers, being over-promoted without any true academic merit could destroy trust between parents, particularly those with high education or high-SES backgrounds who approach academic standards highly instead of focusing on brand recognition (Wilkins & Huisman, 2021). Some argue that the families with lower-SES are more vulnerable to the appeals of marketing, but usually restricted by their financial and accessibility possibilities, not allowing to make positive perceptions into real enrollments (Park & Namkung, 2022).
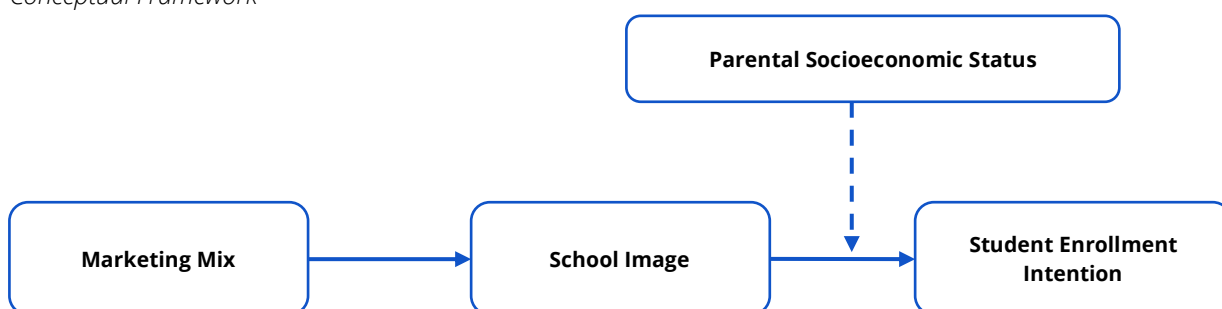
Perspective of Mediation and Moderation.

In the sense of mediation and moderation, the connection between school marketing activities and enrollment intention exists in perceptual and contextual channels. School image acts as an interpreter and helps to convert cognitive and emotional impacts of marketing communication into an intention to behave. Parents who have a positive perception of the school perceiving it as a credible, reputable, and consistent with their educational values would develop a positive image of the school when schools actively promote the use of promotional strategies, have open communication channels, and high-quality services (Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022). Such a positive image strengthens the attitude of parents and increases their preferences to that school, which helps to confirm the mediating role of the attitudes as postulated in the Theory of Planned Behavior as the attitudes (school image) mediate the intervention between the external stimuli (marketing efforts) and the behavioral intention (enrollment decision). This mediated interaction, however, is not present in all social groups, and so the presence of socioeconomic status (SES) of parents is introduced as a mediator.

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Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Hypothesis Development
Marketing Mix and School Image

The strategic application of marketing mix, especially promotion, people, process, and physical evidence, shapes parents' cognitive and affective evaluations of the school, strengthening perceived credibility, service quality, and fit. There is evidence from education services that balanced and value-driven social and digital touchpoints facilitate the narration of quality, reduction of uncertainty, and signaling of reliability by institutions to prospective families, thus elevating the image of a school. In real life, clear information on programs, transparent pricing/financial aid, responsive service processes, and visible facilities serve as quality cues that cohere into a favorable reputation.

H1: The marketing mix has a positive and significant effect on school image.

School Image and Student Enrollment Intention

A good school image, which would incorporate perceptions of credibility, quality, and consistency with family values, increases parents' enrollment intention through awareness transformed into preference and choice. Empirical work in education marketing reveals that brand or image aspects and perceived value resulting from institutional communications and experiences lead to downstream intention and choice likelihood (Wies et al., 2023; Widodo & Maylina, 2022; Julia et al., 2022; Wilkins & Huisman, 2021). Image therefore is the proximal attitudinal mechanism which transforms earlier communications into action tendencies.

H2: School image has a positive and significant effect on student enrollment intention.

Marketing Mix, School Image and Student Enrollment Intention

The marketing mix in educational institutions is a comprehensive set of tools, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence that help build the image of the school and influence parents' perceptions of institutional quality. The implementation of coherent strategies within the school along these dimensions enhances the affective and cognitive brand evaluations, which, in turn, provide a more positive school image (Al Maalouf et al., 2024; Wong et al., 2022; Kwok et al., 2020). An appropriate marketing mix will not only convey value and reliability but also add to the institutional transparency and professionalism that creates trust among prospective parents. These perceptions are further converted into social media engagement and digital storytelling, converting promotional cues into symbolic signals of credibility and care, essential in shaping image and differentiation in the competitive educational market.

H3: School image mediates the relationship between marketing mix and student enrollment intention.

School Image, Parental Socioeconomic Status and Student Enrollment Intention

While school image consistently predicts enrollment intention, it does so variably across different levels of parental SES. Generally, it is observed that families from a higher SES background place greater emphasis on institutional prestige, curriculum diversity, and social reputation than on marketing communications, relying on preestablished networks and firsthand knowledge of schools (Wilkins & Huisman, 2021; Hansen et al., 2018; Park & Namkung, 2022; Li et al., 2021). Conversely, lower-SES parents with limited access to such insider information would tend to depend more on observable marketing signals and perceived image as heuristics for inferring educational quality and value from schools. Therefore, parental SES moderates how strongly image influences intention: marketing-driven

perceptions may have stronger effects among middle- or lower-income parents, while affluent parents would be able to exert a greater sense of decision autonomy and skepticism toward marketing appeals.

H4: Parental socioeconomic status moderates the relationship between school image and student enrollment intention, such that the relationship is stronger among lower-SES parents than higher-SES parents.

Marketing Mix, School Image, Parental Socioeconomic Status and Student Enrollment Intention

The integrated pathway of marketing mix → school image → student enrollment intention represents a moderated mediation framework, where parental SES shapes the mediating influence of school image in the marketing-enrollment behavior relationship. When schools use consistent and inclusive marketing strategies that communicate affordability, accessibility, and credibility, they build a positive image that differs across socioeconomic groups (; Perera et al., 2022; Karabenick, 2014; Kwok et al., 2020). In a family of lower SES, perceived image will be enhanced if marketing communication emphasizes finance transparency, supportive staff, and community-driven values; hence, this enhances enrollment intention. In contrast, signals of exclusivity, advanced pedagogy, and international partnerships could be more effective in influencing the strength of image as a mediator for high-SES families.

H5: Parental socioeconomic status moderates the indirect effect of marketing mix on student enrollment intention through school image, such that the mediated relationship is stronger among lower-SES parents.

Conceptualization

In the past 10 years, marketing research in the education sector has since moved beyond the descriptive studies of the promotion and branding into the consideration of behavioral frameworks geared at connecting the marketing efforts and decision-making psychology. Past research has revealed that the marketing mix is effective as it improves institutional perceptions, engagement, and loyalty in the education sector at higher learning institutions, as well as in the school sector (Perera et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2022). Other theories that have been extensively used to comprehend the influencing power of marketing cues on attitude and intentions include the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Signaling Theory (Li et al., 2021; Al Maalouf et al., 2023). Nevertheless, although there is marked advancements in the study of marketing communication and image building, minimal studies have been done relating to the way these relations operate within the socioeconomic segmentations where perceptions and behavioral response toward school marketing varies widely. The current literature pays little attention to the parental decision-making aspect of enrolling in a particular school, learning the aspects of higher education context rather than paying attention to the issues of inaccessibility and its impact on the disparity between social classes (Wilkins & Huisman, 2021; Widodo & Maylina, 2022). Thus, the existing conceptual framework builds on the current theoretical backgrounds by introducing the attitudinal pathway of TPB (marketing mix - school image - enrollment intention) into the realms of socioeconomic moderation to present a new, context-specific goal of how school marketing affects parental behavioral intention in people belonging to different economic strata.

Methodology

Research Design

The proposed research design is a quantitative, cross-sectional study design that will investigate the interrelations between marketing mix, school image, parental socioeconomic status (SES), and student enrollment intention in the context of the high schools and universities of the United Arab Emirates. Quantitative designs are especially appropriate when the hypothesized associations between latent constructs are to be tested and the stringency and direction of the effects are to be measured with the help of the statistical modeling approach, including Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (Wies et al., 2023; Jabbour et al., 2024;). The use of the cross-sectional design allows to collect data concerning a varied sample of parents during one specific moment of time, identifying perceptions, attitudes, and intentions to act in a particular way, in terms of educational marketing results (Javadiasayesh et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). This methodological direction is congruent with previous works on the research of education and marketing that rely on evidence collection through surveys in order to justify theoretical frameworks and determine causality through mediation and moderation analysis (Park & Namkung, 2022; Kwok et al., 2020). In turn, the selected design guarantees empirical rigor and statistical accuracy of assessing the effect of marketing strategies in increasing the intentions to enroll based on perceptual and socioeconomic routes.

The reason of using a quantitative cross-sectional design is that it allows to take into consideration complicated interdependences between school marketing efforts, school image, parental socioeconomic status (SES), and enrollment intention in one empirical framework. In this manner, it is possible to test several directional, mediating, and moderating paths at the same time, providing an effective insight into the behavioral patterns in educational decision-making (Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022;). The cross-sectional surveys are specifically suitable in cases where there is a desire to measure the perceptions and intentions of a rather large, heterogeneous group of respondents, like parents with different economic and social backgrounds, which gives it portability and statistical validity (Lalicic et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Furthermore, PLS-SEM facilitates validating the theoretical frameworks that entail latent variables, small-to-medium samples, un-normalized data distributions which are characteristic of social sciences studies (Park & Namkung, 2022; Kwok et al., 2020). This design therefore gives it a theoretical and methodological consistency, the investigation can empirically evaluate the role of the marketing plans in producing the image creating and SES-based disparities to influence the parental enrollment behavior.

Sampling

The instrument used to gather data in this study was the structured questionnaire survey which was administered to parents of students and those who intend to enroll to the private schools in urban centers. To investigate the moderating effect of SES, the target population was selected to include parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds to get representations of them. To obtain proportional sampling of the responses based on the incomes and education status, a stratified random sampling technique was used, which provided an opportunity to obtain balanced information regarding the same (how marketing and image affect enrollment behavior) (Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022). Question clarity and reliability as well as understanding of the instruments were investigated through a pilot test of 30 respondents before the actual data collection was carried out. The pilot test results proved the internal consistency and relevance of the measurement scales and some changes in readability and contextual appropriateness were conducted (Wong et al., 2022; Kwok et al., 2020). The completed survey was distributed online and face-to-face so that it can be accessed and received more responses of parents with different statuses of SES.

The questionnaire contained five-point Likert scale questions based on already validated measures on marketing mix, school image, and enrollment intention (Werder et al., 2023; ; Wong et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). Demographic questions were used to obtain major control variables like gender, age, education, monthly household income and number of school going children. In order to be valid and reliable, the instrument was validated in terms of content (expert opinion) and construct (PLS-SEM) in smartPLS 4 software (Widodo & Maylina, 2022, Park & Namkung, 2022, Kwok et al., 2020). The psychometric strength was guaranteed by testing convergent and discriminant validity based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and HTMT ratio thresholds. SmartPLS was especially appropriate to the study because it could conveniently deal with reflective constructs, less large sample sizes, and interact in intricate models of moderated mediation offering high rigor empirical validation of the hypothesized theoretical model.

Results and Discussion

The theoretical framework proposed in this research has been substantiated in the empirical results of the study, as they have shown a strong positive effect on the marketing mix in the context of the school image increase that results in the improvement in student enrollment intention. The findings showed great path coefficients and statistically significant interrelations among the core constructs, which supported the mediated effect of school image and confirmed predictions that were made through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Perera et al., 2022; Widodo and Maylana, 2022;). This model was found to explain a significant percentage of variance in the image of schools (R^2 = 0.766) and the intention to enroll (R^2 = 0.794), meaning that it was predictive and internally consistent (Wong et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). In contrast, the socioeconomic status (SES) of parents grew significantly non-significant in the number of its parents, indicating no difference in the effects of school image lead qualifier on enrollments across socioeconomic lines an observation that contradicts prior assumptions of SES-related distinction of parent behavior (Park & Namkung, 2022; Kwok et al., 2020). Generally, these findings make the role of institutional marketing and

perceptions in creating educational choice central and that perceived marketing communication and reputation-building activities are still decisive in the process of enrollment behavior in competitive school markets.

Table 1

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Construct reliability and validity				
Overview				
	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Marketing_ Mix	0.920	0.921	0.940	0.758
Parental_Socioeconomic_Status	0.909	0.910	0.932	0.733
School_Image	0.917	0.921	0.938	0.751
Student_Enrollment_Intention	0.901	0.902	0.927	0.717

The construct reliability and construct validity analysis findings indicate that all four constructs, Marketing Mix, Parental Socioeconomic Status (PSS), School Image, and Student Enrollment Intention (SEI) have a high level of internal consistency and convergent validity. The alpha of Cronbach is between 0.901 and 0.920, and they are above 0.70 and this represents good levels of reliability of the measurement items. On the same note, composite reliability (rhoa and rho c) test scores range at 0.902 -0.940; which validates that there is no redundancy on any construct, meaning that the measure always measures what it intends to measure. Moreover, the values of Average Variance Extracted(AVE) are between 0.717 and 0.758 and all these values are over the 0.50 mark indicating a satisfactory convergent validity and evidence that over 70 per cent of the variance of each construct is accounted by the relevant indicators (Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022; ; Briganti et al., 2023; Kwok et al. 2020). All these findings shoot up to the conclusion that the measurement model is strong and that further structural model interpretations are dependable and sound.

Figure 2

PLS SEM Bootstrapping
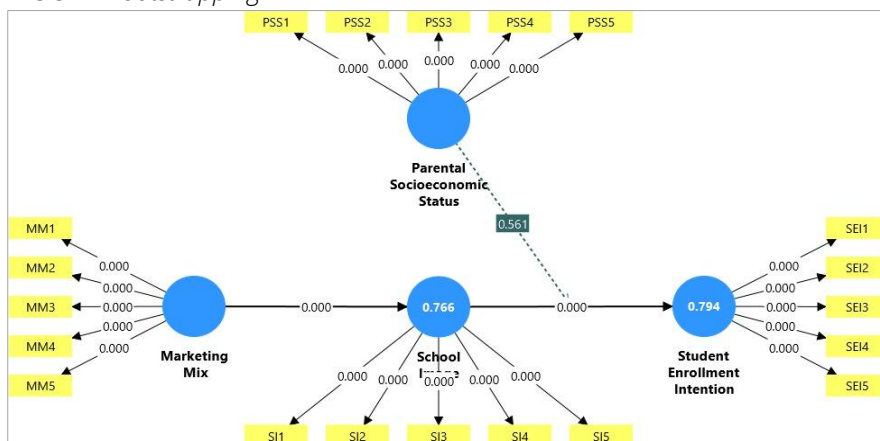
The bootstrapping outcomes of the structural model show that all the direct paths of the core constructs are statistically significant at the p = 0.000 which proves the relationships between constructs which were initially hypothesized in the model. The relationship between Marketing Mix - School Image path shows that there is a strong and positive relationship meaning that effective marketing activities would make a significant improvement in the perceived image of the school among the parents. Otherwise, another test of significance of positive relationship is School Image - Student Enrollment Intention with positive sign, which indicates that positive institutional image is a prime motivator of parents making choices to send their children to school. R2 values of 0.766 and 0.794 of School Image and Student Enrollment Intention are very high to demonstrate the high explanatory power and internal model consistency respectively. On the other hand, the mod factor (Parental Socioeconomic Status - School Image - Enrollment Intention) having p-value of 0.561 but not significant, shows no significant results of socioeconomic status

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to change the relationship between image and intention. On the whole, the findings confirm that school marketing activities improve the image and, consequently, enrollment intention, and parental SES does not have a statistically significant moderating effect in this association (Ram-Tsur et al., 2013; Widodo & Maylana, 2022; Isnaini et al., 2022; Kwok et al., 2020).

Table 2

Hypothesis Testing

Path coefficients					
	Mean, STDEV, T values, p values				
	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Marketing_ Mix -> School_Image	0.875	0.875	0.023	38.428	0.000
Parental_Socioeconomic_Status -> Student_Enrollment_Intention	0.620	0.617	0.061	10.196	0.000
Parental_Socioeconomic_Status x School_Image -> Student_Enrollment_Intention	-0.010	-0.007	0.016	0.581	0.561
School_Image -> Student_Enrollment_Intention	0.303	0.308	0.070	4.317	0.000

The path coefficient output shows that the relationships that were predicted in the model are statistically strong with three paths out of four recording significant positive influences. The marketing mix-school image (b = 0.875, t = 38.428, p = 0.000) shows that the effect has been very strong and significant which significantly shows that successful marketing practices do have a substantial impact on the perceived image of a school. On the same note, School Image - Student Enrollment Intention (b = 0.303, t = 4.317, p = 0.000) shows that a positive institutional image actually contributes positively to the intentions of parents to enroll their children. The Parental Yes - Parental Socioeconomic Status - Enrollment Intention (b = 0.620, t = 10.196, p = 0.000) is also significant relationship which implies that the parental questions are influenced only by the Socioeconomic Structure where those with more sociological wealth are characterized by stronger enrollment intention. Nevertheless, interaction term (Parental SES x School Image - Enrollment Intention) also shows a low and statistically insignificant impact (b = [?]0.010, t = 0.581, p = 0.561), meaning that there is no significant variation in the effect of school image on enrollment intention on the backgrounds of socioeconomic differences. In general, the results prove that marketing activities and the institutional image are essential predictors of enrollment behavior, whereas the moderating effect of SES is insignificant (Watt et al., 2021; Widodo & Maylana, 2022; Wong et al., 2022; Kwok et al., 2020).
PLS SEM

Figure 3

PLS SEM
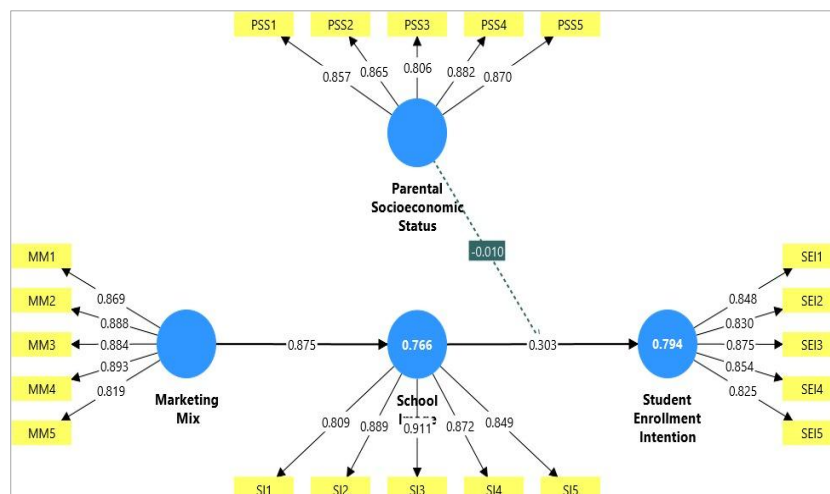
The results of the structural model in this figure indicate that all the indicator loading are above and beyond the 0.80 threshold indicating the existence of strong reliability and convergent validity of all constructs. The marketing mix to image of school path coefficient (b = 0.875) marks a strong relationship which is positive implying that effective marketing practices including promotion, people, process and the physical evidence are important in boosting school image image. The line between School Image and Student Enrollment Intention (b = 0.303) further verifies a positive influence and therefore indicates that the attitude of the parents towards a school is a strong motivating factor in their decisions on school enrolments. The explanatory power of the model is high; R^2 = 0.766 of School Image and R^2 = 0.794 of Student Enrollment Intention i.e. it predicts more than 76-79 percent of the variance in the same construct respectively and this is a good predictive power of the model. On the other hand, the moderating role of Parental Socioeconomic Status (b = 0.010) displays an insignificant small value, which implies that school image and the market in school enrolment are not significantly influenced by socialeconomic disparity. On the whole, the model proves that school marketing efforts have a significant positive performance in enhancing the image of institutions and support enrollment choices, with the moderating factor of parental SES being statistically insignificant (; Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylana, 2022; Dada et al., 2020; Al-Sayegh 2023).

Table 3

Model Fitness

Model fit		
Fit summary		
	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.052	0.060
d_ULS	0.564	0.745
d_G	0.409	0.434
Chi-square	866.350	876.619
NFI	0.880	0.879

The model fit indices show that the proposed conceptual model has a good fit with the observed data in general. SRMR values (0.052 and 0.060) of both the saturated and estimated models fall less than the recommended 0.08 and proves satisfactory level of model fit with low residual values. Equally, there are slight variations (0.564 vs 0.745 and 0.409 vs 0.434) in the dULS and dG values of the saturated model and estimated model, indicating that there is good internal consistency and stability of the model structure. The mismatch between the two models is insignificant as the Chi-square statistics (866.350 vs. 876.619) suggests that the models are adequate. In the meantime, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) values of 0.880 and 0.879 are near the 0.90 standard, which is a good fit in the PLS-SEM standards. In general, these findings confirm that the measurement and structure items of the model match the empirical evidence fairly well, which proves that the model is not only valid but also theoretically sound (; Perera et al., 2022; Pardiyono et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2022; Kwok et al., 2020).

The observations closely coincide with the recent evidence of education-marketing: the exceedingly high Marketing Mix - School Image effect (b=0.875) corresponds to the results where balanced 7Ps expression on the social media boosts perceived credibility and engagement in the context of higher-education and where value-rich communication enhances brand/image aspects of the institutional equity (Perera et al., 2022). The Image - Enrollment Intention relation (b=0.303) is of similar strength as literature that attests to image/credibility as mediating downstream choice intentions in education consumers (Hashemi et al., 2020). In contrast to other forms of segmentation centric claims, our non-significant SES moderation idx indicates that image has a relatively homogenous impact on socioeconomic strata that are in line with work indicating that coherent digital strategy and information quality are highly diagnostic cues, which are largely diagnostic with respect to the specific segment, as researchers indicate that process, people, and physical-evidence-based cues (Li et al., 2021) are relatively homogenous. In sum, the single/ multiple-path design in our model is highly upstream market pulling, image-based mediating and moderating insignificant converges with current multi-channel findings and expectations are narrowed further in regards to SES heterogeneity in enrollment choices.

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Discussion

The final results of the given study contribute significantly to the theory, literature, and practice due to their ability to confirm and provoke the relationships between marketing mix and school image on the one hand and the intention to enroll to school on the other hand, as well as to test the moderating effect of parental socioeconomic status (SES) in a private school setting. Theoretically, the findings are the extensions of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as they prove the institutional marketing efforts to be mediated by school image as an attitudinal variable between institutional marketing efforts and behavioral intention. The high and meaningful connection between Marketing Mix - School Image (b = 0.875) confirms the idea that the perception of parents is conditioned to occur during their consistent exposure to behavioral antecedents promotion, process, people, and physical evidence as a result of repeated use of marketing cues owing to their interdependence (; Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022). This confirms the assumption that TPB makes about the role of attitudes as mediators of the effect of external stimuli on behavioral intentions (Chamundeswari., 2013). The importance of School Image - Enrollment Intention (b = 0.303) also confirms the idea that the good perception of institutional reputation and credibility also implies a high enrollment intention. Nonetheless, the insignificant moderating impact of SES (b = -0.010) offers an interesting theoretical variation that states that parental decision-making in relation to school choice is not differentiated by socioeconomic background as much as anticipated. This is opposed to previous assumptions of segmentation, including that of Li et al. (2021) and Kwok et al. (2020), who hypothesized that consumer reactions to marketing cues varied depending on economic and informational access. Rather, our findings indicate that whatever psychological processes administering the relationship between marketing communication and intention work across social classes when the institutional image is held as credible and trustworthy.

Regarding literature, the findings coincide with the emerging literature that highlights the intermediation of the institutional image and perceived value in marketing educational services and decision-making in education marketing. In line with and Perera et al. (2022), this research empirically argues that effective marketing mix executed using both the traditional and online platforms is critical in creating a school image that directly relates to the desire to join the school. Close to the usefulness of the model can be explained by the high values of explanatory power (R^2 = 0.766 in the case of school image; R^2 = 0.794 in the case of enrollment intention), proved by Widodo and Maylina (2022), who have proven that perceived value and social media utilization serve as critical predictors of behavioral intentions in education markets. Furthermore, we also find parallels in Wong et al. (2022), who concluded that social media marketing increases brand loyalty and engagement in digital-native populations in higher education and may suggest that the same mechanisms are applicable to parents in K-12 or private school classrooms. Our research, on the other hand, contrasts with the Wilkins and Huisman (2021) focus on socio-economic disparities usually as the antecedents of the salience of marketing and image-based persuasion in transnational education. Contrastingly, our findings show that despite any segment of SES, the development of school image and, next, behavioral intention is statistically homogenous, which can be possibly explained by the ubiquitous nature of digital communication and emotional sensitivity of choices made concerning school. This finding is also congruent with the study conducted by Park and Namkung (2022) because the researchers observed that social media credibility and influencer marketing have a stronger effect on purchasing intentions, whereas demographic segmentation is growing less predictive because of information access democratization. Hence, this study makes contributions to the literature by stating that marketing mix and image mechanisms consistent effectiveness is preserved between parental backgrounds in the digital education marketplace.

Conclusion

Findings of this paper are a strong evidence that the marketing mix is a major factor that influences the development of the school image, which in turn, leads to increased student enrollment intention, as postulated in the hypothesis as the mediator. The assumptions made by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) that external marketing cues affect behavioral intentions in other words of attitudinal constructs can be supported by the strength of the direct path between the marketing mix and school image (b = 0.875) and the significant relationship between school image and enrollment intention (b = 0.303) (; Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022; Wong et al., 2022). The insignificant mediating role of parental socioeconomic status (b = -0.010) implies that marketing-based perceptions of credibility

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and quality do have a consistent impact on parental enrollment decisions irrespective of their level of economic backgrounds, a result that contradicts previous association-based segmentation models. The implication of this finding is that the parental choice in contemporary educational markets with substantial deliberation of information transparency and digital access lends to the institutional image and trust rather than the income-based differentiation (Li et al., 2021; Park & Namkung, 2022). In that way, hypothetically, this research enhances the explanatory capabilities of TPB in the educational setting and empirically supports the mediation capacity of image as a behavioral intention determinant.

Practically and policy wise, the findings focus on the fact that schools are to transition beyond traditional promotional campaigns into the world of relationship-based marketing that focuses on the elements of authenticity, transparency, and trust in the community. The effective connection between school image and marketing mix proves that enacting unity in communication, service delivery, and stakeholder interaction to build a consistent and plausible institutional image is significant (Perera et al., 2022) Digital marketing tools, uniformity of branding, and stakeholder-focused activities that inspire the sense of emotional attachment and perceived trustworthiness among parents should be incorporated into educational institutions as per the recommendation of Widodo and Maylina (2022) and Wong et al. (2022). Moreover, as the socioeconomic differences did not play an essential role in affecting the perception or intention, schools need to implement inclusive interventions which are aimed at wide audiences, and at the commonality of the benefits of education and morale in institutions. This work has made a contribution to the marketing and education management literature since it shows that marketing credibility and school image are interconnected to predict enrollment behavior; in addition, this paper can give actionable information to administrators to enhance competitive positioning, student recruitment, and long-lasting institutional reputation (Wies et al., 2023; Widodo & Maylana, 2022; Wong et al., 2022; Bleik., 2013).

Future Research Directions

It is true that even though this study offers effective empirical data on the dynamics of marketing mix, image of the school and enrolment intention, there are still some areas that a learner can explore through future research. To begin with, it is important that future researchers investigate the relationships in various cultures and institutional settings to determine how the results can be generalized to other individuals beyond the present sample. The differences between the educational institutions of the state and independent ones or between the regions might also reveal the notion of moderator roles of contextual factors, including the nature of governance, the reputation of the educational institutions, or cultural values, which influence parental decision-making (Perera et al., 2022; Widodo & Maylina, 2022). Second, longitudinal designs could be utilized by the researchers to observe the development of the school image over time due to the continued marketing effort and its long-term impact on the loyalty and retention beyond the enrollment for a short time (Wong et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). This study is based on the cross sectional data and therefore causal interpretation is not possible thus combining the time based or experimental design may offer greater information on the relationship between cause and effect. Moreover, the lack of significance between parental SES as a moderator indicates that more moderators can be investigated in the future, including cultural capital or trust in educational establishments and digital literacy that might drive parental reactions to the processes of marketing and image-building (Park & Namkung, 2022; Kwok et al., 2020). The extensions would lead to more theoretical refinements and theoretical diversity in education marketing research.

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