SHAPING STUDENT CHOICE: A FRAMEWORK FOR MARKETING OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI
JULY 2026

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SHAPING STUDENT CHOICE: A FRAMEWORK FOR MARKETING OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

By

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Submitted

In fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

to the



Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

July 2026

Dedication

I dedicate this entire work to my supervisors, without whom nothing would have been possible. They gave me a chance with this Ph.D., and it changed my life for good. I am forever grateful to them. I also dedicate this work to my mummy and papa, who have always supported me through thick and thin and have encouraged me to excel to greater heights.

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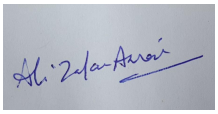

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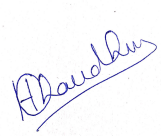

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to those who have contributed to the work presented in this study and my Ph.D. journey. It would not have been possible to complete the dissertation without their guidance, love and support.

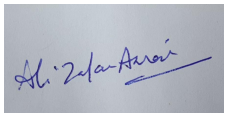
Special mention and thanks to my supervisor Prof. Harish Chaudhry, for selecting me as his scholar and giving me this opportunity. My Ph.D. has been a memorable journey, and I am grateful to you for all your motivation, concern and immense knowledge, Sir. I appreciate all your contribution to making my Ph.D. experience productive, stimulating and full of learning. I am indebted to you for all your kindness, support and patience throughout my journey. I could not have imagined or wished for a better supervisor and mentor for my Ph.D. study.

I would also like to thank Prof. Mahim Sagar, Prof. Sanjay Dhir (Chairperson), Prof. Sumer Singh (External expert) and Prof. Biswajita Parida (Internal Expert), my student research committee (SRC) members. Thank you for your valuable suggestions, critique, and acute insights offered in my study, which have helped me improve the quality of my work and understanding of the research methods and approaches.

I especially extend gratitude to Dr. Nivedita Srivastava and my friend Dr. Shashank Shaurya Dubey for helping me out in building this work. I also thank my co-scholars, Dr. Deepshikha Sharma, Dr. Neeraj Sengar, and Vaibhav Chaudhry for always being supportive in my work. Additionally, I thank my seniors, batchmates, friends, and colleagues at the Department of Management Studies who have been a part of my journey, helped me navigate through the rough tides of a PhD, and made it worth reminiscing.

My parents, Prof. Shabnam Hameed and Mr. Abdul Rafeeque, have been the strongest pillars of my life, I am also thankful to my sister Dr. Aisha Fatima, and I am forever grateful to have them. They have always supported me in all my decisions and have never discouraged me to go for my dreams. Their support has been my firepower, and I am inspired to reach greater heights.

I am indebted to each of you. Thank you all for your support and for constantly pitching for me whenever I needed support.



Ali Zafar Ansari

Abstract

The marketing of higher education institutions (HEIs) has become increasingly complex, as prospective students evaluate a wide range of institutional attributes before making enrolment decisions. Despite the growing importance of institutional communication and relational touchpoints, existing literature remains fragmented in explaining how these attributes shape students' perceptions and subsequently influence their choice of institution. Addressing this gap, this thesis develops and validates a comprehensive perception–choice framework for HEI marketing through a sequential mixed-methods research design.

Study I employs a grounded theory approach based on twenty semi-structured interviews with prospective and current students. The analysis identifies six major institutional drivers—word of mouth, alumni relations, career prospect, industry linkage, institutional culture, and infrastructure—and explains their interrelationships through the lenses of Signaling Theory, Servicescape Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior. The conceptual framework establishes perception as the central mechanism linking institutional drivers with student choice.

Study II empirically validates the proposed framework using survey data collected from respondents. Exploratory Factor Analysis confirms construct adequacy and internal consistency, while Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) supports the hypothesized relationships. The findings demonstrate that word of mouth and career prospect significantly influence perception; alumni relations and industry linkage affect choice indirectly through career prospect and perception; institutional culture and infrastructure exert direct effects on choice; and perception emerges as the strongest predictor of institutional choice.

Study III applies Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) to prioritise the relative strategic importance of the constructs. The results indicate that perception has the highest importance for choice, followed by word of mouth and institutional culture, while perception and word of mouth exhibit comparatively lower performance, thereby highlighting key areas for managerial intervention.

This thesis contributes to HEI marketing literature by offering an integrated, student-centric, and empirically validated framework explaining how institutional signals and environments shape student choice. Methodologically, it combines grounded theory, structural modelling, and IPMA to advance from construct discovery to validation and prioritisation. Managerially, it provides actionable insights for HEIs to strengthen communication, student experience, and employability signalling in order to enhance student perception and institutional choice.

सार

उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों (HEIs) का विपणन लगातार जटिल होता जा रहा है, क्योंकि भावी छात्र प्रवेश संबंधी निर्णय लेने से पहले संस्थान की कई विशेषताओं का मूल्यांकन करते हैं। संस्थागत संचार और संबंधपरक संपर्क बिंदुओं के बढ़ते महत्व के बावजूद, मौजूदा साहित्य यह समझाने में खंडित है कि ये विशेषताएँ छात्रों की धारणाओं को कैसे आकार देती हैं और परिणामस्वरूप उनके संस्थान के चयन को कैसे प्रभावित करती हैं। इस कमी को दूर करने के लिए, यह शोध प्रबंध एक अनुक्रमिक मिश्रित-पद्धति अनुसंधान डिजाइन के माध्यम से HEI विपणन के लिए एक व्यापक धारणा-चयन ढांचा विकसित और मान्य करता है।

अध्ययन I में भावी और वर्तमान छात्रों के साथ बीस अर्ध-संरचित साक्षात्कारों पर आधारित एक जमीनी सिद्धांत दृष्टिकोण का उपयोग किया गया है। विश्लेषण छह प्रमुख संस्थागत कारकों की पहचान करता है—मौखिक प्रचार, पूर्व छात्र संबंध, कैरियर की संभावनाएँ, उद्योग संबंध, संस्थागत संस्कृति और अवसंरचना—और सिग्नलिंग सिद्धांत, सर्विसस्केप सिद्धांत और नियोजित व्यवहार के सिद्धांत के परिप्रेक्ष्य से उनके अंतर्संबंधों की व्याख्या करता है। उभरता हुआ ढांचा धारणा को संस्थागत कारकों को छात्र चयन से जोड़ने वाले केंद्रीय तंत्र के रूप में स्थापित करता है।

अध्ययन II उत्तरदाताओं से एकत्रित सर्वेक्षण डेटा का उपयोग करके प्रस्तावित ढांचे को अनुभवजन्य रूप से मान्य करता है। एक्सप्लोरेटरी फैक्टर एनालिसिस (एक्सप्लोरेटरी फैक्टर एनालिसिस) संरचना की पर्याप्तता और आंतरिक संगति की पुष्टि करता है, जबकि पार्शियल लीस्ट स्क्वेयर्स स्ट्रक्चरल इक्वेशन मॉडलिंग (PLS-SEM) परिकल्पित संबंधों का समर्थन करता है। निष्कर्ष दर्शाते हैं कि मौखिक प्रचार और कैरियर की संभावनाएँ धारणा को महत्वपूर्ण रूप से प्रभावित करती हैं; पूर्व छात्र संबंध और उद्योग संपर्क कैरियर की संभावना और धारणा के माध्यम से अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से चयन को प्रभावित करते हैं; संस्थागत

संस्कृति और अवसंरचना चयन पर प्रत्यक्ष प्रभाव डालती हैं; और धारणा संस्थागत चयन के सबसे मजबूत भविष्यवक्ता के रूप में उभरती है।

अध्ययन III में संरचनाओं के सापेक्ष रणनीतिक महत्व को प्राथमिकता देने के लिए महत्व-प्रदर्शन मानचित्र विश्लेषण (IPMA) का उपयोग किया गया है। परिणाम बताते हैं कि चयन के लिए धारणा का महत्व सबसे अधिक है, उसके बाद मौखिक प्रचार और संस्थागत संस्कृति का, जबकि धारणा और मौखिक प्रचार का प्रदर्शन तुलनात्मक रूप से कम है, जिससे प्रबंधकीय हस्तक्षेप के लिए प्रमुख क्षेत्रों पर प्रकाश डाला गया है।

यह शोध प्रबंध एक एकीकृत, छात्र-केंद्रित और अनुभवजन्य रूप से मान्य ढांचा प्रस्तुत करके उच्च शिक्षा संस्थान विपणन साहित्य में योगदान देता है, जो बताता है कि संस्थागत संकेत और वातावरण छात्र चयन को कैसे आकार देते हैं। कार्यप्रणाली के अनुसार, यह संरचना की खोज से सत्यापन और प्राथमिकता निर्धारण तक आगे बढ़ने के लिए ग्राउंडेड थ्योरी, स्ट्रक्चरल मॉडलिंग और IPMA को जोड़ता है। प्रबंधकीय दृष्टि से, यह उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों को संचार, छात्र अनुभव और रोजगार क्षमता संबंधी संकेतों को मजबूत करने के लिए व्यावहारिक अंतर्दृष्टि प्रदान करता है ताकि छात्रों की धारणा और संस्थागत चयन को बढ़ाया जा सके।

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ACRONYM INDEX

HEI: Higher Education Institutions

WOM: Word of Mouth

CP: Career Prospect

AR: Alumni Relations

IL: Industry Linkage

P: Perception

C: Choice

IN: Infrastructure

IC: Institution Culture

GT: Grounded Theory

EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis

CFA: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

SEM: Structural Equation Modelling

IPMA: Importance Performance Map Analysis