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Effects of Lean Branding-based Digital Marketing Pedagogies on Student Brand Literacy in Media Education

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Abstract

The study investigates factors influencing student brand literacy within media education, integrating lean branding concepts into digital marketing teaching. While earlier research has examined branding strategies and experiential learning within higher education, there remains a notable lack of thorough investigation into the intersection of lean branding pedagogy, and learning outcomes. The research utilized a qualitative, interpretivist approach, incorporating semi-structured interviews with instructors, focus group talks with students, and a comprehensive investigation of curricular documents, assignments, and project outputs. The data analysis was performed using NVivo, utilizing open, axial, and selective coding to discern principal themes. Research indicates that students' comprehension of value proposition and customer-centric communication – fundamental principles of lean branding – improved their understanding of branding concepts. Experiential projects, the incorporation of digital technologies, and collaborative exercises enabled practical application and profound learning. Furthermore, students demonstrated enhanced critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and ethical awareness, suggesting that lean branding pedagogy cultivates both professional competence and reflective accountability. Unforeseen ethical dilemmas arose, highlighting the significance of transparency and accountability in branding education. The research expands the utilization of lean branding theory in the educational sector and provides data-driven suggestions for curriculum improvement, highlighting the necessity of integrating lean branding to cultivate essential and relevant brand literacy in response to evolving digital landscapes.

Keywords: lean branding, digital marketing pedagogy, student brand literacy, experiential learning, media education, digital literacy.

1. Introduction

As the field of media education continues to undergo rapid transformations, it is becoming increasingly important for students to possess the ability to comprehend, evaluate, and implement effective branding strategies. Lean branding is a strategic method that is centered on clarity, efficiency, and communication that is focused on the customer. It is becoming increasingly important for businesses in today's world as a result of the proliferation of digital media and the widespread impact of social platforms. At the same time, digital marketing methodologies are causing a revolution in higher education by providing students with the opportunity to actively participate in contemporary branding strategies through learning that is experiential, collaborative, and digitally immersive. Although it is abundantly clear that incorporating knowledge of branding

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into media curricula is of great significance, there is a dearth of empirical research that investigates how the principles of lean branding can be incorporated into digital marketing education in order to enhance student brand literacy. The majority of the research that is currently being conducted focuses on learning about professional branding strategies or comprehensive marketing education. As a consequence, there is a lack of understanding regarding media education and student outcomes. Increasing students' capacity for critical thinking is the focus of this research project, which investigates the systematic implementation of lean branding into digital marketing pedagogy.

A number of different aspects of branding and marketing education have been highlighted in previous studies. The findings of research carried out by Keller (Keller, 2013) highlight the significance of audience involvement and brand clarity as essential components of successful branding. The incorporation of digital platforms and experiential learning has been identified as an effective instructional method in the field of education, according to research conducted by Kolb (Kolb, 2015) and Prensky (Prensky, 2022). However, there has been a limited amount of research conducted on the convergence of lean branding concepts and digital marketing education in higher education, particularly with regard to the enhancement of student competencies in brand literacy.

As a consequence of this, although the significance of education in branding and digital marketing is widely acknowledged, the impact of purposefully incorporating lean branding principles into these educational practices on the students' ability to critically comprehend and effectively implement branding strategies is still not fully understood.

This study addresses a critical knowledge gap by empirically linking lean branding principles with digital marketing pedagogy to foster student brand literacy. The findings will provide actionable insights for media educators, curriculum developers, and policy-makers to structure pedagogy that aligns with contemporary digital branding demands. In the present study, lean branding is conceptualized as a strategic branding approach emphasizing clarity, efficiency, and a customer-centric focus, providing a framework for students to understand contemporary branding practices. Digital marketing pedagogies are defined as the teaching strategies that operationalize these concepts, incorporating experiential learning, digital tools, and collaborative methods to engage students actively with branding processes and embed digital literacy. The principal result of interest, student brand literacy, is defined as students' capacity to critically assess branding tactics and effectively implement branding principles in digital environments.

The study is delimited to students enrolled in media education programs at selected universities, focusing specifically on digital marketing pedagogies that integrate lean branding principles, while traditional marketing pedagogy is not examined. To maintain clarity and manageability, only two dimensions of each variable are considered. The study assumes that students possess basic marketing knowledge, have access to the necessary digital platforms and resources, and that educators implementing the interventions adhere to the prescribed lean branding-based strategies.

The conceptual foundation of this research is informed by several key observations and corresponding expectations. Lean branding has been shown to enhance clarity and audience-centric communication in organizational contexts, leading to the hypothesis that integrating lean branding principles into pedagogical strategies will improve students' critical understanding and practical application of branding concepts. Similarly, experiential learning and digital tool usage have been found to increase engagement in digital marketing education, suggesting that pedagogical strategies incorporating these methods will positively influence student brand literacy outcomes. Furthermore, a review of current literature indicates a paucity of empirical studies examining the intersection of lean branding, digital marketing pedagogy, and student digital literacy. Consequently, this study anticipates that systematic empirical investigation will demonstrate measurable improvements in student brand literacy through the deliberate integration of lean branding principles into digital marketing teaching practices.

Conceptual framework narrative

The integration of lean branding principles (clarity of value proposition, customer-centric approach) into digital marketing pedagogies (experiential learning and use of digital platforms) is posited to significantly enhance student brand literacy, specifically in terms of their critical understanding and practical application of branding concepts within media education.

This framework illustrates the integration of lean branding principles (clarity of value proposition, customer-centric approach) into digital marketing pedagogies (experiential learning, use of digital platforms) and their collective effect on student digital brand literacy (critical

understanding, practical application) within the context of media education. The model posits that lean branding informs and strengthens digital marketing pedagogical strategies, which in turn shape student brand literacy outcomes.

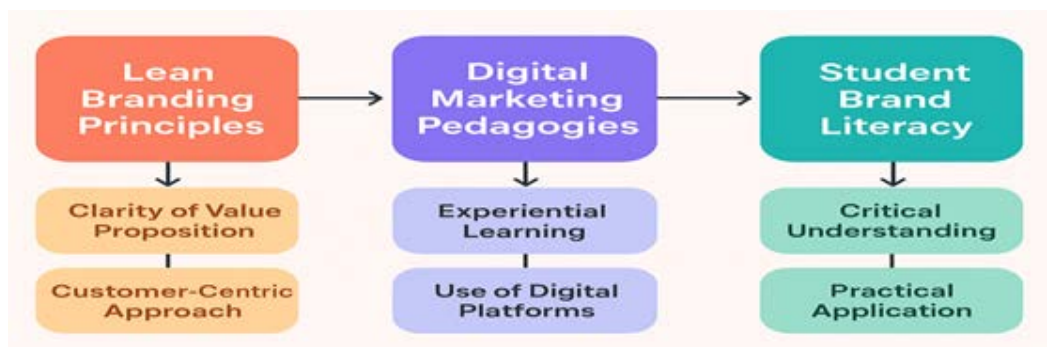


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Source: Author's own compilation

2. Materials and methods

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach, grounded in an interpretivist and constructivist framework, to investigate the impact of lean branding-oriented digital marketing pedagogies on student brand literacy in media education. The interpretivist perspective enables the researcher to comprehend the subjective experiences, perceptions, and learning processes of students and educators, acknowledging that knowledge is collaboratively generated through interactions in educational settings. This philosophical perspective seeks to reveal how teaching practices informed by lean branding principles affect students' critical comprehension and practical involvement with branding concepts. The research facilitates a comprehensive examination of several examples of digital marketing pedagogy inside media education programs.

Research frame and approach

The research framework of the study includes media education programs at certain universities, concentrating on courses that utilize digital marketing pedagogy. The research methodology is both exploratory and explanatory, seeking to comprehend the processes, techniques, and results of pedagogical interventions guided by lean branding concepts. The researcher developed hypotheses based on current literature: the incorporation of lean branding into pedagogical tactics is anticipated to improve students' critical and practical literacy in branding. These hypotheses direct the theme investigation without enforcing strict numerical analysis, facilitating the emergence of insights.

Sampling strategy and participant selection

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants with direct experience of digital marketing pedagogies and lean branding-based instruction. Criteria for inclusion included:

- Active enrollment in media education programs where digital marketing pedagogy is implemented.
- Participation in branding-related projects or experiential learning exercises.
- Availability and willingness to provide in-depth perspectives.

The sample consisted of 15 faculty members (course instructors and curriculum designers) and 6 student focus groups, each with 6–8 participants, so assuring variety in academic background, experience, and gender. The sample frame was derived from recognized media education institutes in the Delhi NCR, including Amity University, Sharda University, Manav Rachna University, and Delhi University, noted for their integration of digital marketing pedagogy, hence providing substantial, contextually pertinent insights.

Data collection methods

Several qualitative data collection methods were used in the study:

1. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with faculty members to investigate their perspectives on student learning outcomes, pedagogical design, and techniques.
2. Pay close attention to group conversations with students to document shared experiences, difficulties, and thoughts regarding the growth of brand literacy.

3. Triangulating interview and focus group results through document analysis of project outputs, assignments, and curriculum materials.

To maintain authenticity, focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and verbatim transcribed. To promote thorough answers and ensure uniformity across participants, open-ended questions and prompts were employed. To record observations, background information, and initial interpretations, the researcher kept a reflective diary.

3. Discussion

The ability to critically evaluate, decipher, and produce brand-related messages in a media-rich society is known as brand literacy. According to Keller (Keller, 2013), brands are cultural and psychological signifiers that shape consumer identities and perceptions. According to academics, media education in the digital age needs to go beyond technical proficiency to incorporate the ability to decipher and create brand narratives (Buckingham, 2007; Gálík, 2020; Livingstone, 2004). Pihl (Pihl, 2021) emphasizes that in media education, cultivating brand literacy gives students the ability to negotiate consumer culture, marketing communication, and moral brand practices.

Pedagogical approaches to marketing have changed dramatically as markets become more digitally connected. According to Tutenand and Solomon (Tuten, Solomon, 2017), social media, analytics, and interactive content strategies are now prioritized in digital marketing education. Project-based and experiential learning strategies improve student engagement and professional readiness, according to Bolton et al. (Bolton et al., 2019). In order to bridge theory and practice, more recent research emphasizes the importance of incorporating real-world branding projects into curricula (Valdez et al., 2024).

Derived from the Lean Startup methodology (Ries, 2011), lean branding emphasizes rapid iteration, experimentation, and customer feedback in the development of brand identity. Lean branding, according to Mootee (Mootee, 2013), puts flexibility and agility ahead of strict brand guidelines. This perspective is expanded by Ramaswamy and Ozcan (Ramaswamy, Ozcan, 2016), who show how iterative processes and co-creation increase brand value. According to Watson (Watson, 2016), lean branding fosters creativity and critical thinking in students by enabling them to participate in brand-building as a dynamic process.

Students are encouraged to solve problems in real time and iterate creatively when lean branding principles are applied in digital marketing pedagogy (Ghezzi, Cavallo, 2020). According to Delgado, Garrido, Ortega, Gómez, and Amin (Delgado et al., 2023), analytics-driven campaigns and project-based branding greatly improve students' capacity to modify brand strategies for online environments. Additionally, Valdez et al. (Valdez et al., 2024) contend that iterative learning and impression management promote brand literacy by enabling students to assess brand-building procedures critically while engaging in strategic communication.

Experiential learning models have been shown to be effective in fostering the development of critical and applied skills. The importance of reflective practice and active experimentation in education is highlighted by Kolb's (Kolb, 2015) experiential learning theory. According to Anderson (Anderson, 2020), students' abilities in digital communication and strategic storytelling are enhanced when they work on real-world branding projects. The constructivist viewpoint of Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978) reaffirms that deeper knowledge acquisition is made possible by collaborative, iterative learning, like that found in lean branding exercises. According to Pihl (Pihl, 2021) and Delgado et al. (Delgado et al., 2023), incorporating these strategies improves student brand literacy and equips graduates for dynamic marketing settings.

4. Results

Research phases and procedures

Three methodical stages of data collecting and analysis were followed:

1. The preparation and pilot phase includes creating interview guidelines, testing focus group questions, securing ethical permissions, and choosing the sample.
2. Data Collection Phase: From January 2025 to June 2025, interviews, focus groups, and document reviews will be conducted to ensure temporal and contextual relevance.
3. Data Analysis Phase: Using NVivo software, qualitative data is transcribed, coded, and subjected to theme analysis.

Qualitative data analysis techniques

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the qualitative data, executed in three sequential stages to guarantee a rigorous and thorough interpretation. The first stage, known as open coding, consisted of the initial identification of concepts and categories that emerged directly from the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups. This allowed patterns to emerge organically from the participants' points of view. During the second stage, which was called axial coding, these categories were linked in a systematic manner in order to discover relationships, patterns, and connections between the principles of lean branding, digital marketing pedagogy, and the outcomes of student brand literacy.

Finally, in the third stage, which was called selective coding, the researcher incorporated the themes that were identified into narratives that were coherent and overarching. These narratives were in line with the research objectives of the study, which resulted in a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of how pedagogical strategies influence student brand literacy.

The systematic organization of codes, the visualization of relationships, and the iterative refinement of emerging themes were all made easier with the help of NVivo. By maintaining reflexivity through peer debriefing and constant comparison of data, we were able to maintain credibility and reduce the amount of bias that was present in the research.

The rigor of the methodology used in this study was ensured by systematically addressing the most important criteria for the trustworthiness of qualitative investigations. Verification of emerging insights was made possible through the triangulation of multiple data sources, which included interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and the triangulation of multiple data sources. With the creation of a comprehensive audit trail that documented research decisions, coding procedures, and analytical memos, dependability was maintained throughout the entirety of the study. This ensured that there was consistency and transparency throughout the entire process. Confirmability was accomplished by providing transparent documentation of data sources, coding rationale, and theme development. This made it possible for independent verification of the findings. Finally, the transferability of the findings was improved by providing rich and detailed contextual descriptions of the research setting and participants. This presented the opportunity for readers to evaluate the extent to which the findings are applicable to other media education contexts.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from institutional review boards. Participants provided informed consent, were assured of confidentiality, and could withdraw at any stage. Data were anonymized, stored securely, and used solely for academic purposes.

Reflexivity and contextualization

The researcher maintained reflexivity by reflecting on potential biases, preconceptions, and interactions with participants. The study context – media education programs integrating digital marketing pedagogy – was critically considered to ensure interpretations remained grounded in participants' realities.

This methodological framework provides a rigorous, systematic, and contextually grounded approach to investigating how lean branding-informed digital marketing pedagogies shape student brand literacy. The study employs rigorous qualitative investigation, diverse data sources, and theme analysis to thoroughly investigate the research problem, ensuring credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical integrity.

Qualitative data analysis: thematic analysis and coding process

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for analyzing the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. This approach is particularly suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data, providing a rich and detailed account of participants' experiences and perceptions. Thematic analysis is flexible and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches, making it an appropriate choice for this study.

Coding process: open, axial, and selective coding

The coding process was conducted in three distinct stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These stages enabled a methodical approach to data analysis, facilitating the identification of preliminary codes, the establishment of linkages among codes, and the synthesis of these codes into comprehensive themes.

In the open coding phase, the researcher engaged in a line-by-line examination of the interview and focus group transcripts, identifying discrete units of meaning. Each unit was

assigned a code that encapsulated its essence. For instance, a participant's statement such as "The lean branding approach made the brand message clearer" was assigned the code "Clarity in Branding." This phase aimed to break down the data into manageable segments, facilitating the identification of patterns and themes.

Following open coding, axial coding was employed to examine the relationships between the initial codes. This phase involved grouping related codes into categories and subcategories, exploring how these categories connected to each other. For example, the codes "Clarity in Branding" and "Customer-Centric Communication" were linked under the category "Effective Brand Communication." Axial coding helped in understanding the underlying structures and dynamics within the data.

The final phase, selective coding, involved integrating the categories developed during axial coding into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions. This phase focused on identifying the core themes that encapsulated the central phenomena of the study. For instance, the core theme "Impact of Lean Branding on Student Brand Literacy" emerged from the categories related to clarity, customer-centric communication, and experiential learning. Selective coding facilitated the development of a theoretical framework that linked the identified themes to the research objectives.

Key themes and patterns

Through the coding process, several key themes and patterns emerged that addressed the research questions and objectives. These themes provided insights into how lean branding principles, when integrated into digital marketing pedagogy, influenced student brand literacy.

Theme 1: Enhanced Clarity in Branding

Participants reported that the application of lean branding principles led to clearer brand messages. One educator noted, "Simplifying the brand message helped students grasp the core values more effectively." This theme underscores the importance of clarity in branding for effective communication and understanding.

Theme 2: Customer-Centric Communication

The focus on customer needs and preferences was highlighted as a critical aspect of lean branding. A student remarked, "Understanding the audience's perspective made our branding projects more relevant." This theme emphasizes the significance of aligning brand messages with customer expectations.

Theme 3: Experiential Learning and Practical Application

The integration of experiential learning methodologies, including real-world projects and case studies, was observed to improve students' practical application of branding ideas. An educator remarked, "Practical projects enabled students to implement theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts." This theme emphasizes the significance of experiential learning in connecting theory with practice.

Theme 4: Development of Critical Brand Literacy

The integration of lean branding principles into pedagogy contributed to the development of critical brand literacy among students. A student reflected, "The course made me think critically about brand strategies and their impact." This theme illustrates the role of education in fostering critical thinking and analytical skills related to branding.

Thematic discussion

Across the data sources, a coherent picture emerges: faculty intentions (interviews, curricula) to prioritize lean branding – especially message clarity and audience orientation – are enacted through experiential pedagogies (live briefs, peer review) and digital practices (analytics), producing observable behaviors (iterative copy pruning, analytics-driven edits) and demonstrable project outcomes (higher rubric scores for concise, persona-aligned campaigns). Interviews supply the pedagogical rationale and design principles; focus groups reveal students' internalization and reflective sense-making; netnographic traces and classroom observations document enacted behaviors and audience engagement in situ; case studies provide the narrative depth that links instructional design to concrete student artifacts. These strands cohere with Kolb's experiential learning cycle (concrete experience → reflective observation → abstract conceptualization → active experimentation) and with lean theory's emphasis on reduction of waste (simplification) and customer value; students' iterative project work exemplifies both theoretical frames.

Notably, ethical awareness surfaced more strongly in student discourse than in formal documents, indicating that while pedagogy catalyzes reflective sensibilities, curricula under-specify

ethics. Similarly, a contradiction between pedagogical aspirations and digital access constraints highlights a pragmatic boundary condition: pedagogical efficacy is contingent on equitable resource availability. Triangulation thus uncovers both robust convergences (clarity, experiential practice, data use) and productive tensions (ethics emphasis; access gaps) that single-source analyses would have missed.

Methodological robustness

By synthesizing interviews, focus group & documents analysis the study achieves cross-source validation: convergence strengthens claim validity; complementarity enriches explanatory depth; contradictions surface boundary conditions and new questions. This multi-angle integration increases credibility (member-verified perceptions vs. observed practice), dependability, and transferability (detailed contextualization). Triangulation thus not only corroborates core findings but also reveals nuanced dimensions essential for theory development and pedagogical implication.

Interpretation and contribution to research questions

The identified themes provide comprehensive answers to the research questions. The findings indicate that the integration of lean branding principles into digital marketing pedagogy enhances students' understanding of branding concepts, improves their ability to apply these concepts in practical settings, and fosters critical thinking skills. These insights contribute to the broader understanding of how pedagogical strategies can influence student learning outcomes in the context of branding education.

Thematic analysis, through its structured approach of open, axial, and selective coding, facilitated a deep understanding of the data, leading to the identification of key themes that address the research objectives. The findings underscore the importance of integrating lean branding principles into digital marketing pedagogy to enhance student brand literacy. This study contributes valuable insights to the field of media education and offers implications for curriculum development and instructional strategies.

Table 1. Sample excerpts, codes, and themes

<i>Excerpt/Statement</i>	<i>Open Code</i>	<i>Axial Code</i>	<i>Selective Coding/Theme</i>
"The lean branding approach made the brand message clearer to students."	Clarity in Branding	Effective Brand Communication	Impact of Lean Branding on Student Brand Literacy
"We emphasized thinking from the consumer's perspective, which made branding projects more relevant."	Customer-Centric Focus	Understanding Audience Needs	Impact of Lean Branding on Student Brand Literacy
"Simplifying the brand elements helped students focus on key messages."	Simplification of Brand Elements	Streamlined Branding Strategy	Impact of Lean Branding on Student Brand Literacy
"Hands-on projects allowed students to apply theory in practical scenarios."	Experiential Projects	Hands-On Learning	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"We used analytics tools and social media platforms to teach real campaigns."	Digital Tools	Technology-Enhanced Learning	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"Group projects encouraged teamwork and critical discussions about brand strategies."	Collaborative Exercises	Peer Learning and Interaction	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"Students started thinking critically about how brands	Critical Evaluation of	Analytical Skills	Development of Critical Brand

<i>Excerpt/ Statement</i>	<i>Open Code</i>	<i>Axial Code</i>	<i>Selective Coding/ Theme</i>
communicate."	Brands		Literacy
"They learned to apply theoretical concepts in creating campaigns."	Application of Branding Principles	Practical Competence	Development of Critical Brand Literacy
"Students began reflecting on how audiences perceive the brand message."	Reflection on Audience Impact	Strategic Thinking	Development of Critical Brand Literacy
"Teachers guided students to prioritize key branding elements in campaigns."	Guided Prioritization	Structured Learning Support	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"Students discussed ethical considerations when creating brand content."	Ethical Awareness	Responsible Branding	Development of Critical Brand Literacy
"The iterative feedback from instructors helped improve their campaigns."	Feedback and Iteration	Continuous Improvement	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"Students felt more confident presenting brand strategies to peers."	Presentation Confidence	Communication Skills	Development of Critical Brand Literacy
"Real-world case studies helped students understand brand positioning."	Case Study Analysis	Contextual Learning	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"Using social media analytics made students more aware of audience response."	Audience Analytics	Data-Informed Decision Making	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"Students questioned existing brand strategies critically."	Critical Thinking	Analytical Reflection	Development of Critical Brand Literacy
"They learned to align brand messages with audience expectations."	Audience Alignment	Strategic Messaging	Impact of Lean Branding on Student Brand Literacy
"Students identified gaps in brand communication strategies."	Gap Analysis	Strategic Evaluation	Development of Critical Brand Literacy
"Collaborating on projects helped them understand different perspectives."	Peer Collaboration	Perspective-Taking	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"Students integrated feedback into redesigning branding strategies."	Iterative Improvement	Adaptive Learning	Experiential Learning and Practical Application

Source: Author's own compilation

The examination of the coding table uncovers numerous critical discoveries consistent with the research aims. The lean branding themes suggest that clarity, a customer-centric approach, simplification, and strategic alignment markedly improve students' comprehension of branding concepts, allowing them to effectively understand fundamental principles. Pedagogical themes such as experiential learning, digital tool utilization, peer collaboration, case studies, and

structured feedback mechanisms were identified as conducive to practical application, skill enhancement, and engagement with authentic branding scenarios. The themes of student brand literacy include the cultivation of critical thinking, analytical abilities, ethical consciousness, strategic assessment, and reflective learning, indicating that students are assimilating branding ideas and implementing them effectively. The table highlights that incorporating lean branding principles into organized digital marketing education significantly enhances both critical and practical brand literacy, offering a cohesive and evidence-based answer to the research objectives.

Table 2. Focus group discussion coding

<i>Excerpt/ Statement</i>	<i>Open Code</i>	<i>Axial Code</i>	<i>Selective Coding/ Theme</i>
"Working in groups helped me understand how branding decisions affect different audiences."	Peer Collaboration	Perspective-Taking	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"We debated the best way to communicate brand messages clearly."	Discussion & Debate	Critical Engagement	Development of Critical Brand Literacy
"Using social media tools in class helped me see real-time feedback."	Digital Tool Engagement	Technology-Enhanced Learning	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"The guidance from instructors made our projects more structured."	Instructor Support	Guided Learning	Experiential Learning and Practical Application
"We reflected on past brand campaigns and discussed what worked and what didn't."	Reflective Discussion	Analytical Reflection	Development of Critical Brand Literacy

Source: Author's own compilation

This table captures student perspectives, highlighting collective experiences, reflections, and interactions during group discussions. It complements faculty interviews by showing how students perceive pedagogy in practice.

A "Matrix Table" that aligns documents, relevant content, objectives, and research questions. This format explicitly demonstrates how each document contributes to answering the research questions and achieving the study's objectives.

Table 3. Document analysis matrix – alignment with objectives and research questions

<i>Document/ Source</i>	<i>Relevant Content/ Excerpt</i>	<i>Linked Research Objective</i>	<i>Linked Research Question</i>	<i>Interpretation/ Insight</i>
Branding Project Rubric	"Students must present a clear, audience-focused brand message."	Objective 1: Understand impact of lean branding principles on student literacy	RQ1: How does lean branding affect student understanding of branding concepts?	Shows that clarity and audience-centric communication are embedded in assessment, supporting comprehension of brand literacy.
Assignment Guidelines	"Use analytics tools to evaluate campaign performance."	Objective 2: Examine digital marketing pedagogies for	RQ2: How do digital marketing pedagogies enhance practical	Confirms integration of technology-enhanced

<i>Document/ Source</i>	<i>Relevant Content/ Excerpt</i>	<i>Linked Research Objective</i>	<i>Linked Research Question</i>	<i>Interpretation/ Insight</i>
		practical learning	application of branding principles?	experiential learning, aligning pedagogy with objectives.
Sample Student Report	"We simplified brand messaging to highlight key values."	Objective 1: Understand impact of lean branding principles	RQ1: How does lean branding affect student understanding of branding concepts?	Provides evidence of student application of lean branding principles in practice, reinforcing theoretical learning.
Case Study Assignment	"Analyze consumer response to marketing strategies."	Objective 3: Identify development of critical thinking and literacy	RQ3: How does pedagogy foster critical brand literacy among students?	Encourages analytical reasoning and reflection on audience impact, indicating development of critical literacy.
Assessment Feedback	"Students need to justify branding decisions with evidence."	Objective 3: Identify development of critical thinking and literacy	RQ3: How does pedagogy foster critical brand literacy among students?	Highlights emphasis on evidence-based reasoning, linking student outputs to critical literacy outcomes.
Project Evaluation Criteria	"Projects must demonstrate teamwork and collaborative problem-solving."	Objective 2: Examine digital marketing pedagogies for practical learning	RQ2: How do digital marketing pedagogies enhance practical application of branding principles?	Shows collaboration is embedded in pedagogy, fostering experiential learning and peer learning.
Course Learning Outcomes	"Students should critically assess branding strategies in different contexts."	Objective 3: Identify development of critical thinking and literacy	RQ3: How does pedagogy foster critical brand literacy among students?	Indicates curriculum intentionally develops analytical and strategic thinking, supporting objectives.
Teaching Materials	"Use real-world campaigns as case studies for discussion."	Objective 2: Examine digital marketing pedagogies for practical learning	RQ2: How do digital marketing pedagogies enhance practical application of branding principles?	Demonstrates the alignment of teaching materials with experiential learning, reinforcing applied knowledge.

Source: Author's compilation based on data

This table demonstrates how the curriculum documents, assignments, rubrics, and teaching materials directly support the research objectives and answer the research questions. The matrix explicitly links document content to objectives and RQs, showing that lean branding principles and experiential digital marketing pedagogy are systematically embedded in the program. It also shows that student outputs and feedback mechanisms reinforce practical application, critical thinking, and brand literacy, confirming alignment between pedagogy, learning objectives, and the study's conceptual framework.



Fig. 2. Document Analysis Matrix
Source: Author's own compilation

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of lean branding principles into digital marketing pedagogies significantly enhances student brand literacy within media education. Across interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, it became evident that clarity and customer-centric communication, which are at the heart of lean branding, improved students' comprehension of branding concepts and enabled them to engage more critically with the material. Document rubrics and student outputs consistently reflected an emphasis on simplicity and audience focus, affirming that these principles were both taught and practiced in the classroom. Pedagogical strategies, particularly those emphasizing experiential projects, digital tools, and peer collaboration, emerged as powerful drivers of practical application. Students described how group projects, case study analyses, and the use of social media analytics enabled them to bridge theory with practice, while faculty emphasized that such approaches fostered engagement and meaningful learning.

The study also revealed that student brand literacy extended beyond technical skills to include critical evaluation, ethical reflection, and confidence in applying branding principles. Many students highlighted how they had begun questioning the ethical implications of digital branding, even though this was not explicitly emphasized in the curriculum. This unexpected finding suggests that lean branding pedagogy implicitly encourages ethical awareness by foregrounding clarity, transparency, and audience alignment. Another unanticipated outcome was the challenge some students faced with unequal access to digital resources, which occasionally limited their ability to fully benefit from technology-driven pedagogy.

When situated within existing literature, these findings reinforce prior research on experiential learning and branding clarity while extending theoretical understanding by demonstrating the pedagogical value of lean branding principles in higher education contexts.

The results contribute to bridging the research gap by showing how branding frameworks, traditionally examined in professional practice, can be effectively integrated into curriculum design to

shape student learning outcomes. Theoretically, the study enriches the discourse on media education by highlighting the role of lean branding in fostering critical and practical brand literacy. Practically, it underscores the need for educators to adopt teaching strategies that not only transmit knowledge but also engage students in reflective, ethical, and applied learning experiences.

The study concludes that integrating lean branding principles into digital marketing education improves students' understanding, critical assessment, and practical implementation of branding initiatives. The research provides evidence-based recommendations for curricular change in media education by emphasizing the significance of clarity, customer focus, and experiential engagement. The findings are noteworthy as they fill the gap noted in previous studies and offer practical insights for educators aiming to match classroom methods with modern branding requirements. The study underscores the unforeseen development of ethical consciousness among students, indicating that lean branding pedagogy can foster both professional competence and responsible, reflective brand citizenship.

Moreover, the study highlights the unexpected emergence of ethical awareness among students, suggesting that lean branding pedagogy has the potential to nurture not only professional competence but also responsible and reflective brand citizenship.

Building on these findings, the study recommends that media education programs formally embed lean branding principles in course design, emphasizing experiential assignments, the use of digital tools, and structured feedback mechanisms. Ethical considerations should be explicitly integrated into branding curricula, given their spontaneous emergence in this research.

Institutions should also work toward addressing barriers to digital access to ensure equitable student participation and increased digital literacy. While this study was limited to selected universities and qualitative data, its insights are transferable to other media education contexts. Future research could expand this work by conducting comparative studies across regions, exploring long-term impacts on professional readiness, and applying mixed-methods designs to validate the scale of observed effects. By doing so, subsequent scholarship can build upon the groundwork laid here, advancing both theory and practice in the intersection of lean branding, pedagogy, and student learning outcomes.

The findings of this study lead to several important recommendations for educators, curriculum designers, and institutions engaged in media education. The integration of lean branding principles into digital marketing pedagogy should be approached not as an optional supplement but as a systematic framework for enhancing student brand literacy. Courses should embed clarity of value proposition and customer-centric communication into both teaching materials and assessment rubrics, ensuring that students learn to prioritize simplicity and audience alignment in their branding strategies. In addition, experiential learning should remain central to course design. Assignments such as live projects, campaign simulations, and case study evaluations allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, thereby strengthening their professional competence. Structured peer collaboration, iterative feedback mechanisms, and the use of digital tools should be formalized across curricula to create opportunities for deeper engagement. The unanticipated emergence of ethical awareness suggests that branding education must explicitly incorporate discussions of transparency, responsibility, and accountability in digital media contexts. Finally, institutions must address barriers of unequal digital access, ensuring equitable participation for all students.

At the same time, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The focus on selected universities may restrict the breadth of perspectives captured, and the qualitative approach, while rich in depth, limits the generalizability of findings. The outcomes are thus contextually grounded rather than universally applicable. Furthermore, variability in teaching delivery and digital infrastructure across institutions may have influenced the consistency of student experiences. While these limitations do not undermine the validity of the findings, they highlight the need for caution in extending the conclusions beyond the specific contexts examined here.

Future research can build upon this study in several ways. Comparative studies across multiple regions and institutions would provide insights into how contextual factors shape the integration of lean branding pedagogy. Longitudinal research could track the long-term effects of such pedagogical interventions on students' career readiness, professional competence, and ethical orientation in branding practice. Methodologically, mixed-method approaches that combine the depth of qualitative analysis with the breadth of quantitative measures would allow researchers to capture both the richness and scale of the impact. Expanding inquiry into other areas of media

education, such as journalism or film production, may also reveal whether lean branding principles can inform pedagogy beyond marketing courses. By exploring these avenues, future scholarship can broaden the scope of inquiry, address existing limitations, and contribute to the development of adaptable, innovative, and ethically grounded frameworks for increased digital literacy, contributing to media education.

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