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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKETING MIX ELEMENTS AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITY EVENTS: A CASE STUDY OF PESKON, UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

University events have increasingly evolved into strategic platforms that support student engagement, institutional branding and experiential learning within higher education institutions. Despite the growing importance of university-based events, empirical understanding of how marketing mix dimensions shape student engagement remains limited, particularly in higher education event contexts in developing countries. Therefore, this study examines the relationships between marketing mix elements namely Product, Price, Place, Promotion and People and student engagement during the Pesta Konvokesyen (PESKON) event at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). A quantitative research approach was adopted and data were collected from 317 student attendees using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis and Pearson correlation analysis were employed using SPSS version 28. The findings reveal that all five marketing mix dimensions demonstrated statistically significant positive relationships with student engagement ($p < 0.001$). Among the dimensions, Price showed the strongest relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.929$), followed by Place ($r = 0.822$) and Product ($r = 0.788$), while Promotion demonstrated the weakest relationship ($r = 0.617$). The findings indicate that students' engagement is strongly associated with perceptions of affordability, value-for-money, event accessibility and experiential quality. In contrast, promotional activities and staff interaction appear to play more complementary roles in influencing engagement behaviour. Practically, the findings provide important implications for university event organisers in designing more effective strategies that enhance student participation and overall event experience.

Keywords: Marketing mix; student engagement; university events; PESKON; higher education events.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are increasingly recognising the importance of student engagement as a critical component of educational success, institutional reputation and holistic student development. In recent years, universities have expanded their focus beyond classroom-based learning by incorporating co-curricular activities, experiential learning opportunities and campus events as part of the broader student experience ecosystem (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019). University events such as festivals, exhibitions, cultural celebrations, sports competitions and convocation festivals have become important mechanisms for fostering social interaction, emotional attachment and institutional connectedness among students (Kahu, 2013; Kuh, 2016; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

Traditionally, university events were primarily organised as ceremonial or entertainment-based activities with limited strategic orientation. However, contemporary higher education environments have transformed these events into platforms that contribute to institutional branding, student engagement and experiential learning (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Universities increasingly compete not only through academic excellence but also through the quality of campus experiences provided to students. Consequently, university events now function as strategic tools that shape students' perceptions of campus life and institutional identity.

Student engagement has been widely acknowledged as an important determinant of academic achievement, satisfaction, retention and institutional loyalty (Kahu, 2013; Kuh, 2016). Engagement refers to the extent to which students are behaviourally, emotionally and cognitively involved in educational and co-curricular activities (Kahu, 2013; Fredricks et al., 2004). Within university event contexts, engagement reflects students' participation, enthusiasm, satisfaction and willingness to revisit or recommend events to others. According to Kahu (2013), engagement is influenced by multiple contextual factors including institutional environment, support systems and experiential quality.

University events provide students with opportunities for networking, social interaction, skill development and emotional connection with the institution. Events also contribute to the development of soft skills such as communication, teamwork and leadership while enhancing students' sense of belonging and campus attachment. However, participation and engagement in university events are not guaranteed. Students' involvement is strongly influenced by their perceptions of event value, relevance, accessibility and quality of experience (Prayag et al., 2017; Muskat et al., 2019).

Events such as Pesta Konvokesyen (PESKON) at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) represent important examples of large-scale university events designed to enhance student participation and campus vibrancy. PESKON combines entertainment, food festivals, exhibitions, entrepreneurship activities and social interactions within a celebratory campus atmosphere. These events aim not only to entertain students but also to strengthen institutional identity and enrich campus life.

Despite the growing importance of university events in enhancing campus experience and institutional engagement, sustaining strong student participation remains a significant challenge. While some students actively participate in campus activities and events, others demonstrate limited interest and lower levels of involvement. These variations indicate that student engagement is shaped by multiple underlying factors including experiential quality, perceived value, event attractiveness and marketing-related dimensions (Kahu, 2013; Prayag et al., 2017; Rather, 2021; Pai et al., 2021). From a theoretical perspective, Expectation Confirmation Theory explains that satisfaction and engagement occur when individuals perceive that actual experiences meet or exceed their initial expectations (Bhattacharjee, 2001). In university event settings, students develop expectations regarding event quality, affordability,

accessibility and enjoyment prior to participation. Positive confirmation of these expectations contributes to higher satisfaction and stronger engagement.

Similarly, servicescape theory highlights the importance of physical and environmental factors in shaping behavioural outcomes and user experiences (Bitner, 1992). In event settings, environmental dimensions such as venue accessibility, crowd management, layout and ambience significantly influence attendees' perceptions and emotional responses. Previous studies indicate that environmental comfort and spatial quality positively affect satisfaction and revisit intention among event attendees (Sharma & Nayak, 2023).

The marketing mix framework provides another useful perspective for understanding factors influencing engagement in university events. Traditionally consisting of Product, Price, Place and Promotion, the framework was later expanded to include People in service contexts (Booms & Bitner, 1981). In event management, these dimensions collectively shape participants' experiences and behavioural responses. Product refers to the core event offerings including activities, entertainment, programme variety and experiential quality. Price relates to affordability and perceived value-for-money. Place concerns accessibility, venue design and environmental conditions. Promotion involves communication strategies and awareness-building efforts, particularly through digital and social media platforms. People refer to the role of staff, volunteers and service interaction in shaping participants' experiences. Previous studies have demonstrated that marketing mix dimensions significantly influence customer satisfaction, loyalty and behavioural intention within tourism, hospitality and event settings (Getz & Page, 2016; Prayag et al., 2017; Pai et al., 2021). However, the application of the marketing mix framework within university event environments remains relatively underexplored.

Most higher education studies focus primarily on academic service quality, institutional reputation and educational satisfaction rather than event-specific engagement (Mogaji & Maringe, 2016; Sultan & Wong, 2019). Furthermore, university events differ substantially from commercial events because they are often non-profit-oriented and involve diverse student motivations shaped by social, emotional and educational factors.

The rise of Generation Z students has transformed event participation behaviour, as this generation is highly influenced by experiential value, social media interaction and emotionally engaging experiences when participating in events (Hudson et al., 2015; Sharma & Nayak, 2023). They tend to prioritise memorable experiences, convenience and social interaction over purely informational or promotional content. Consequently, university event organisers face increasing pressure to design events that align with students' evolving expectations and lifestyle preferences.

In Malaysia, research examining student engagement in university events remains limited. Existing studies suggest that affordability and perceived value are important determinants influencing participation among university students. However, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how different marketing mix dimensions collectively shape engagement behaviour in university event settings. Moreover, previous studies reveal inconsistencies concerning the relative importance of marketing mix dimensions. Product quality and Price are often associated with stronger satisfaction and behavioural intention, whereas findings regarding Promotion and People remain inconsistent across different contexts (Kruger & Saayman, 2019; Rather, 2021). These inconsistencies highlight a significant research gap in understanding how marketing mix dimensions operate within higher education event environments. Therefore, this study aims to provide empirical insight into the relationship between marketing mix dimensions and student engagement in university events. Using the PESKON event at Universiti Utara Malaysia as the study context, the research examines students' perceptions of event marketing dimensions and how these dimensions are associated with engagement behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Engagement in Higher Education

Student engagement has become one of the most widely discussed concepts in higher education research due to its strong association with academic performance, retention, satisfaction and institutional loyalty (Kahu, 2013; Kuh, 2016). Engagement refers to students' involvement, commitment and active participation in educational and co-curricular activities. According to Kuh (2016), engaged students are more likely to demonstrate higher academic achievement, stronger emotional attachment to their institution and greater personal development. Kahu (2013) conceptualises student engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions. Behavioural engagement refers to participation in academic and extracurricular activities, emotional engagement involves feelings of belonging and satisfaction, while cognitive engagement reflects psychological investment in learning and institutional experiences (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Within university event settings, student engagement extends beyond academic involvement and includes participation in social, cultural and experiential activities organised by the institution. University events provide opportunities for networking, entertainment, leadership development and social interaction, thereby contributing to holistic student development. Recent studies indicate that experiential activities and campus events significantly contribute to students' sense of belonging and emotional connection with the institution (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2006). Active participation in university activities and campus events has been associated with higher levels of student satisfaction, sense of belonging and institutional attachment (Kahu, 2013; Kuh, 2016; Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019).

The increasing emphasis on experiential learning has further strengthened the role of university events in higher education. Experiential learning theory suggests that meaningful learning occurs through active participation and direct experiences rather than passive observation (Kolb, 1984). University events create experiential environments where students can interact, collaborate and engage socially outside classroom settings. However, student engagement in university events is influenced by multiple factors including event attractiveness, accessibility, affordability, environmental quality and emotional experience (Prayag et al., 2017). Therefore, understanding how marketing mix dimensions shape engagement behaviour is important for improving the effectiveness of university events.

Marketing Mix Framework in Event Management

The marketing mix framework is one of the most influential concepts in marketing and service management. Originally developed by McCarthy (1964) through the four dimensions of Product, Price, Place and Promotion, the framework was later expanded by Booms and Bitner (1981) to include People in service industries. In event management contexts, the marketing mix framework provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding how different event attributes influence attendees' experiences and behavioural intentions (Getz & Page, 2016). Each dimension contributes uniquely to shaping participants' perceptions and engagement.

Product represents the core event offerings including programme quality, entertainment value, variety of activities and experiential attributes (Getz & Page, 2016; Pai et al., 2021). Price relates to affordability and perceived value-for-money (Zeithaml, 1988; Kruger & Saayman, 2019). Place

concerns venue accessibility, physical environment and servicescape conditions (Bitner, 1992; Lin, 2016). Promotion involves communication strategies and awareness-building activities (Hudson et al., 2015; Kotler et al., 2019). People refer to interactions between attendees and event staff, volunteers or organisers (Bitner, 1992; Ali et al., 2016). Previous studies indicate that marketing mix dimensions significantly influence satisfaction, loyalty and behavioural intentions in tourism and event settings (Prayag et al., 2017; Pai et al., 2021). However, the relative importance of these dimensions varies depending on event context, target audience and participants' motivations. In university event settings, students may evaluate event experiences differently from traditional consumers because their motivations involve social interaction, campus belonging and emotional experiences rather than purely commercial consumption.

Product

Product is considered one of the most important dimensions within the marketing mix framework because it represents the core value offered to consumers or participants. In event settings, Product includes programme variety, entertainment quality, experiential value and the overall attractiveness of event activities (Booms & Bitner, 1981; Kotler et al., 2019; Getz & Page, 2016). Previous studies indicate that experiential quality strongly influences satisfaction, emotional attachment and revisit intention among event attendees (Muskat et al., 2019; Pai et al., 2021). High-quality event programmes create memorable experiences that enhance participants' emotional responses and overall engagement. Prayag et al. (2017) found that emotional experiences and experiential value significantly affect satisfaction and behavioural intentions in tourism and event settings. Similarly, Pai et al. (2021) reported that perceived service quality and programme attractiveness positively influence satisfaction among festival attendees. Within university event contexts, students are likely to engage more actively when events offer enjoyable, interactive and meaningful experiences aligned with their interests and expectations.

Price

Price refers to the monetary and non-monetary costs associated with participating in an event. In university settings, affordability and perceived value-for-money are particularly important because students often operate under financial constraints (Kruger & Saayman, 2019). Perceived value theory explains that consumers evaluate experiences based on cost-benefit comparisons (Zeithaml, 1988). Students are more likely to participate in events when they perceive that the benefits and enjoyment obtained justify the costs involved. Previous studies demonstrate that price fairness significantly influences satisfaction, loyalty and behavioural intention in service and event settings (Rather, 2021). Kruger and Saayman (2019) also found that perceived affordability contributes positively to festival satisfaction and revisit intention. In university event settings, affordable ticket prices, reasonable food costs and accessible participation fees are likely to encourage stronger engagement among students.

Place

Place refers to venue accessibility, environmental quality, spatial layout and physical surroundings within event settings. Servicescape theory explains that environmental conditions significantly influence emotional responses, satisfaction and behavioural outcomes (Bitner, 1992). Previous studies indicate that venue accessibility, comfort and spatial organisation positively affect visitor satisfaction and behavioural intention (Lin, 2016; Sharma & Nayak, 2023). A well-designed event environment

enhances convenience and reduces participation barriers. Within university event contexts, students are more likely to participate actively when event venues are easily accessible, comfortable and well-organised. Environmental factors such as crowd management, signage and navigation also influence students' experiences.

Promotion

Promotion encompasses communication strategies designed to heighten awareness and stimulate participation, with contemporary event management increasingly leveraging digital and social media platforms. Research by Hudson et al. (2015) indicates that social media communication significantly influences emotional attachment and engagement behavior among attendees. Recent studies also suggest that digital and social media marketing play important roles in influencing participation behaviour and engagement among younger audiences and Generation Z consumers (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Sharma & Nayak, 2023). However, awareness alone is often insufficient to trigger actual participation; promotional content must be emotionally evocative and experience-oriented to be effective (Ali et al., 2016; Rather, 2021). This is particularly relevant for Generation Z students, who prioritize visual content, social interaction, and digital connectivity when evaluating campus events. Consequently, university organizers frequently utilize platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to align with these preferences. Despite its role in increasing visibility, the direct relationship between promotion and engagement remains inconsistent in existing literature (Hudson et al., 2015; Rather, 2021). The findings of this study confirm this trend, as Promotion demonstrated the weakest positive relationship with student engagement compared to other marketing mix elements. This suggests that while promotional efforts successfully generate cognitive awareness, they are less effective at independently driving behavioral participation unless supported by high experiential quality and perceived value.

People

People refer to the role of staff, volunteers and service personnel in shaping participants' experiences during events. Service interaction significantly influences emotional connection, satisfaction and overall experience quality (Bitner, 1992; Ali et al., 2016). Recent studies also suggest that interpersonal interaction and service responsiveness positively influence attendee satisfaction and engagement behaviour in event settings (Sharma & Nayak, 2023). Rather (2021) highlighted that interpersonal interaction contributes to emotional attachment and perceived value. In university events, friendly and responsive staff members create welcoming environments that improve participants' overall experiences (Bitner, 1992; Ali et al., 2016). Volunteers and event organisers also contribute to crowd management, communication and problem-solving during events (Getz & Page, 2016). However, compared to structural dimensions such as Product and Price, the influence of People may function more as a supporting factor rather than a dominant driver of engagement (Rather, 2021).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

University events have increasingly become strategic platforms for enhancing student engagement, promoting institutional identity and enriching campus life. In contemporary higher education environments, university events are not only viewed as recreational activities but also as important components of students' holistic learning experiences and campus engagement (Kahu, 2013; Kuh, 2016). Despite their growing importance, student participation in university events often remains inconsistent and lower than expected. This suggests that engagement in university events is influenced

by various factors related to event design, perceived value and overall experience quality rather than occurring naturally (Kahu, 2013; Prayag et al., 2017).

Previous studies have highlighted that elements such as event quality, pricing, venue accessibility, promotional effectiveness and staff interaction play important roles in shaping participant satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Getz & Page, 2016; Kruger & Saayman, 2019; Rather, 2021). Experiential quality and emotional engagement have also been identified as important determinants influencing satisfaction and participation behaviour in event settings (Ali et al., 2016; Pai et al., 2021). However, these findings are largely derived from tourism, hospitality and commercial event contexts, with limited focus on higher education event environments. In university settings, where events are often non-commercial and involve diverse student motivations, the relative importance of these factors may differ considerably (Mogaji & Maringe, 2016; Sultan & Wong, 2019).

In the Malaysian context, empirical studies examining student engagement in university events remain limited. Existing studies suggest that affordability, perceived value and experiential quality are important determinants influencing students' participation in campus-based activities and events (Zeithaml, 1988; Pai et al., 2021). However, there is still insufficient understanding regarding how different dimensions of the marketing mix namely Product, Price, Place, Promotion and People are associated with student engagement in university event settings, particularly within Malaysian public universities.

Furthermore, previous research demonstrates inconsistencies regarding the relationships between marketing mix dimensions and engagement outcomes. While Product quality and Price are frequently associated with stronger satisfaction and behavioural intention, findings relating to Promotion and People remain inconsistent across different event contexts (Hudson et al., 2015; Rather, 2021; Sharma & Nayak, 2023). For instance, social media promotion may successfully increase awareness, but awareness alone does not necessarily translate into actual participation unless promotional content is emotionally appealing and experience-oriented (Hudson et al., 2015; Ali et al., 2016). Similarly, while staff interaction contributes positively to participants' experiences, its influence may function more as a supporting factor rather than a dominant driver of engagement (Rather, 2021).

This lack of empirical clarity highlights an important research gap in understanding how marketing mix dimensions relate to student engagement within higher education event environments. Without such understanding, university event organisers may face difficulties in designing strategies that align with students' expectations and encourage stronger participation. Therefore, there is a need to systematically examine the relationships between marketing mix dimensions and student engagement in university events, particularly within the Malaysian higher education context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between marketing mix dimensions and student engagement in university events. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to collect standardised data from a relatively large sample and statistically analyse relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Survey-based methods are widely used in event management and higher education research because they facilitate the measurement of perceptions, attitudes and behavioural tendencies (Hair et al., 2019). Quantitative approaches also allow researchers to evaluate relationships between constructs objectively using statistical techniques.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of students attending the PESKON event at UUM. Since the event was open to students from different academic programmes and colleges, the population included undergraduate and postgraduate students from diverse academic backgrounds. A convenience sampling technique was employed because respondents were approached directly during the event based on accessibility and willingness to participate. Convenience sampling is commonly applied in event-related research due to the practical challenges associated with obtaining complete sampling frames during large-scale events (Kruger & Saayman, 2019). A total of 317 valid responses were collected. According to Hair et al. (2019), the sample size exceeded the minimum threshold required for correlation analysis and reliability testing, thereby ensuring adequate statistical power.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire distributed during the PESKON event. Respondents were approached at various locations within the venue including food stalls, activity booths, exhibition areas and entertainment zones. Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the data collection process to minimise response bias and ensure participants' privacy. Collecting data during the actual event enabled respondents to evaluate their experiences immediately, thereby improving ecological validity and reducing recall bias.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire for this study was developed based on established and validated measurement scales from prior research in event management, services marketing and higher education contexts. The instrument consisted of three main sections. The first section captured respondents' demographic profile, including background characteristics such as gender, age and academic information. The second section measured perceptions of the marketing mix elements, namely Product, Price, Place, Promotion and People, while the third section assessed student engagement in the PESKON event.

The measurement items for the marketing mix elements were adapted from well-established frameworks and empirical studies in both service and event contexts (Booms & Bitner, 1981; Kotler et al., 2019; Kruger & Saayman, 2019). Specifically, the Product dimension, which includes aspects such as variety of activities and service quality, was adapted from event experience studies (Prayag et al., 2017; Muskat et al., 2019). The Price dimension, focusing on perceived fairness and affordability, was derived from perceived value and pricing literature (Pai et al. (2021)). The Place dimension, which examines venue accessibility, layout, and physical environment, was grounded in servicescape theory (Bitner, 1992; Lin, 2016). The Promotion dimension, relating to communication effectiveness and marketing channels, was adapted from studies on event marketing and social media (Ali et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the People dimension, which reflects staff interaction and service delivery, was derived from service interaction and co-creation literature (Mogaji & Maringe, 2016).

Student engagement was measured using indicators related to satisfaction, recommendation intention and future participation behaviour. These items were adapted from established higher education and event engagement studies (Kahu, 2013; Kuh, 2016; Prayag et al., 2017), ensuring alignment with the conceptual definition of engagement in both educational and experiential contexts. All measurement

items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scale is widely recognised for its reliability and suitability in measuring attitudes, perceptions and behavioural intentions in social science research (Joshi et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean and standard deviation) were used to summarise respondent characteristics and perceptions of the marketing mix elements. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variables (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People) and the dependent variable (Student Engagement). This method is widely used in event and tourism research to assess the strength and direction of relationships among constructs (Hair et al., 2019; Prayag et al., 2017).

Reliability and Validity

Internal consistency of the measurement constructs was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (CA), which is widely accepted in social science research. As presented in Table 1, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating acceptable to high levels of internal consistency. Specifically, the Price ($\alpha = 0.887$) and Promotion ($\alpha = 0.890$) constructs demonstrated high reliability, while Place ($\alpha = 0.808$) and Student Engagement ($\alpha = 0.851$) exhibited good reliability levels. Meanwhile, Product ($\alpha = 0.731$) and People ($\alpha = 0.722$) achieved acceptable reliability despite having fewer items, which is consistent with methodological recommendations (Hair et al., 2019). Overall, the results in Table 1 confirm that the measurement scales are reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis. Content validity was also established through expert review to ensure alignment with the study objectives.

Table 1

Reliability Analysis of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Level
Product	0.731	Acceptable
Price	0.887	Good
Place	0.808	Good
Promotion	0.890	Good
People	0.722	Acceptable
Student Engagement	0.851	Good

RESULTS

Demographic Profile

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, followed by their academic background, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the sample. As shown in Table 2, the majority of respondents were female (71.0%), indicating a higher level of participation among female

students in university events. The age distribution is highly concentrated, with 99.7% of respondents aged between 20 and 29 years, reflecting the typical university student population and confirming that the event successfully reached its intended audience. Socio-cultural composition shows that the majority of respondents were Malay (79.2%) and Muslim (79.2%), followed by Chinese respondents (15.5%) and Buddhist respondents (14.5%). All respondents were Malaysian, indicating that the sample appropriately represents the local university student population within the Malaysian higher education context.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 317)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	225	71.0
	Male	92	29.0
Age	20–29 years	316	99.7
	40–50 years	1	0.3
Religion	Islam	251	79.2
	Buddha	46	14.5
	Christian	15	4.7
	Hindu	4	1.3
	Other	1	0.3
Race	Malay	251	79.2
	Chinese	49	15.5
	Indian	10	3.2
	Other	7	2.2
Nationality	Malaysian	317	100.0

Academic Background

The academic background of respondents is presented in Table 3. The findings indicate that the majority were undergraduate students (97.2%) and enrolled in full-time study (99.4%), suggesting that students who are more engaged in campus life are more likely to participate in university events. Participation was highest among senior students, particularly those in Year 3 and Year 4, indicating that engagement tends to increase with academic progression. This supports the student engagement framework, which suggests that engagement develops over time through accumulated experiences (Kuh, 2016).

Table 3

Academic Background of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Level of Study	Undergraduate	308	97.2
	Postgraduate	8	2.5
	Other	1	0.3
Mode of Study	Full-time	315	99.4
	Other	2	0.6
College	COLGIS	223	70.3
	COB	63	19.9
	CAS	31	9.8
Year of Study	Year 1	13	4.1
	Year 2	77	24.3
	Year 3	95	30.0

Year 4	123	38.8
Year 5	9	2.8

Descriptive Analysis of Marketing Mix Elements

Table 4 reveals clear differences in students' perceptions across the marketing mix dimensions. Among the five elements, Product recorded the highest evaluation, particularly in terms of quality of services/products ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.752$). Similarly, the variety of activities met students' expectations with a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.862$). These findings suggest that the core offerings of PESKON event successfully met student expectations, reinforcing the importance of experiential quality in event settings. This finding is consistent with Muskat et al. (2019), Pai et al. (2021) and Sharma and Nayak (2023), who emphasise that high-quality event content and experiential value significantly enhance satisfaction and perceived value.

The Price dimension showed moderately positive perceptions, indicating that students generally considered the event affordable. The item "ticket prices reasonable for value" recorded a mean score of 3.54 ($SD = 0.915$). However, the lower mean score for "cost did not prevent participation" ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.989$) suggests that additional expenses may still influence students' participation decisions. This indicates that affordability and perceived value-for-money remain important considerations among university students, consistent with Zeithaml (1988) and Kruger and Saayman (2019).

The Place dimension was also positively evaluated, particularly in terms of signage effectiveness ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.951$) and venue accessibility and layout ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.966$). This finding aligns with servicescape theory (Bitner, 1992), which posits that physical environments significantly influence user experience and behavioural responses. A well-organised venue appears to have contributed positively to participants' overall experience. Similar findings were reported by Sharma and Nayak (2023), who highlighted the importance of servicescape and environmental quality in shaping visitor satisfaction and behavioural intention.

In contrast, Promotion emerged as the weakest dimension, with promotional channels effectiveness recording a mean score of 2.58 ($SD = 1.090$), while promotional content attractiveness recorded a similarly low mean value ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.165$). These findings indicate that the promotional strategies employed were less effective in engaging students compared to other marketing mix dimensions. This finding is consistent with Hudson et al. (2015) and Rather (2021), who suggested that promotional communication may increase awareness but may not necessarily translate into active participation unless supported by emotional and experiential value.

The People dimension demonstrated moderate performance, suggesting that while staff and volunteer interactions contributed to the event experience, they were not perceived as a major strength. Staff friendliness recorded a mean score of 2.82 ($SD = 1.090$), whereas interaction motivates participation showed a slightly higher mean value ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.220$). This aligns with Prayag et al. (2017) and Sharma and Nayak (2023), who highlighted that interpersonal interaction and emotional experiences play supportive roles in shaping event satisfaction and overall experience quality.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Marketing Mix Elements

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Variety of activities met expectations	3.66	0.862
Quality of services/products felt high	3.96	0.752
Ticket prices reasonable for value	3.54	0.915
Cost did not prevent participation	3.31	0.989
Venue accessibility and layout	3.34	0.966
Signage effectiveness	3.61	0.951
Promotional channels effectiveness	2.58	1.090
Promotional content attractiveness	2.59	1.165
Staff friendliness	2.82	1.090
Interaction motivates participation	3.30	1.220

Student Engagement

Table 5 indicates that student engagement was moderate overall. While respondents reported that the event met their expectations ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.151$), overall satisfaction ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.144$) and future attendance intention ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.082$) were relatively lower. This suggests that although PESKON event delivered a satisfactory experience, it may not have been sufficiently distinctive to ensure strong repeat participation. The relatively high recommendation score ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.941$) indicates positive word-of-mouth potential, yet the lower intention to revisit highlights a gap between satisfaction and long-term loyalty. This finding supports Kuh (2016), who argues that sustained engagement requires continuous improvement in value and experience design. Similar findings were also reported by Rather (2021) and Sharma and Nayak (2023), who emphasised that emotional experiences and perceived value significantly influence revisit intention and long-term engagement behaviour.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Student Engagement

Item	Mean	SD
Overall satisfaction	3.32	1.144
Event met expectations	3.74	1.151
Recommend to others	3.64	0.941
Likely to attend again	3.06	1.082

Correlation Analysis

The correlation results presented in Table 6 reveal that all five marketing mix elements namely Product, Price, Place, Promotion and People have statistically significant positive relationships with student engagement ($p < 0.001$). This finding provides strong empirical support for the applicability of the marketing mix framework in explaining engagement behaviour within higher education event contexts.

More importantly, the variation in the strength of these relationships offers deeper insights into the relative importance of each element in shaping student engagement.

Among the five elements, Price demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.929$), indicating a very strong positive relationship. This suggests that students' engagement decisions are highly sensitive to perceptions of affordability and value-for-money. In university settings, where students often operate under financial constraints, price becomes a critical determinant of participation behaviour. The exceptionally high correlation coefficient further implies that pricing is not merely a supporting factor, but a dominant driver of engagement. This finding is consistent with Zeithaml (1988) and Pai et al. (2021), who highlighted that perceived value and affordability significantly influence satisfaction and participation behaviour in event settings. In the context of PESKON event, this suggests that even minor changes in perceived cost or value could substantially influence student participation levels.

The Place dimension also demonstrated a very strong relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.822$), highlighting the importance of the physical environment in shaping event experiences. This finding strongly supports servicescape theory (Bitner, 1992), which emphasises that environmental factors such as accessibility, layout and spatial design significantly influence user perceptions and behavioural outcomes. In practical terms, this suggests that a well-organised, easily accessible and navigable event space enhances convenience and reduces participation barriers, thereby increasing engagement. This result is consistent with Lin (2016) and Sharma and Nayak (2023), who underscored the role of servicescape and environmental quality in enhancing visitor satisfaction and behavioural intention. The high correlation indicates that Place is not merely a logistical consideration, but a strategic factor in event design.

Similarly, the Product dimension showed a strong positive relationship with engagement ($r = 0.788$), confirming that the quality and attractiveness of event offerings are key drivers of student participation. This finding is in line with previous research highlighting that experiential quality significantly influences satisfaction and behavioural intentions in event settings (Muskat et al., 2019; Pai et al., 2021; Sharma & Nayak, 2023). The strong correlation suggests that students place considerable importance on the relevance, variety and quality of activities provided during the event. Thus, Product remains a core component of the overall engagement experience.

In contrast, the People dimension exhibited a moderate relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.644$), indicating that staff and volunteer interactions play a supportive rather than dominant role. While interpersonal interaction contributes to the overall event experience, its influence appears secondary compared to structural elements such as pricing and event quality. This finding is consistent with Ali et al. (2016) and Rather (2021), who highlighted that interpersonal interaction and emotional experiences contribute positively to satisfaction and perceived value. The moderate correlation suggests that improving staff friendliness, responsiveness and communication can enhance the overall experience, but may not be sufficient to significantly increase participation without improvements in other key areas.

Finally, Promotion recorded the weakest relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.617$), despite being statistically significant. This finding suggests that while promotional efforts may successfully generate awareness, they are less effective in directly influencing engagement behaviour. This observation aligns with previous studies indicating that promotion primarily affects the cognitive stage of awareness rather than the behavioural stage of participation (Ali et al., 2016; Dwivedi et al., 2021). In the context of PESKON event, this may imply that students were aware of the event but were not sufficiently motivated to participate based solely on promotional messages. The relatively weaker correlation highlights the need for more targeted, engaging and value-oriented communication strategies that emphasise the unique benefits of participation rather than merely providing information.

Overall, the correlation findings suggest that student engagement in university events is predominantly driven by value-based (Price), environmental (Place) and experiential (Product) factors, while communication (Promotion) and interpersonal (People) elements serve as complementary influences. This hierarchy of influence provides important theoretical and practical insights, indicating that effective event management strategies must prioritise core value and experience dimensions while supporting them with appropriate promotional and service interaction efforts.

Table 6

Correlation between Marketing Mix Elements and Student Engagement

Variable	r	p-value	Strength
Price	0.929	<0.001	Very Strong
Place	0.822	<0.001	Very Strong
Product	0.788	<0.001	Strong
People	0.644	<0.001	Moderate
Promotion	0.617	<0.001	Moderate

DISCUSSION

The correlation results presented in Table 6 reveal that all five marketing mix elements namely Product, Price, Place, Promotion and People have statistically significant positive relationships with student engagement ($p < 0.001$). This finding provides strong empirical support for the applicability of the marketing mix framework in explaining engagement behaviour within higher education event contexts. More importantly, the variation in the strength of these relationships offers deeper insights into the relative importance of each element in shaping student engagement.

Among the five elements, Price demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.929$), indicating a very strong positive relationship. This suggests that students' engagement decisions are highly sensitive to perceptions of affordability and value-for-money. In university settings, where students often operate under financial constraints, price becomes a critical determinant of participation behaviour. The exceptionally high correlation coefficient further implies that pricing is not merely a supporting factor, but a dominant driver of engagement. This finding is consistent with Zeithaml (1988), and Kruger and Saayman (2019), who highlighted that perceived value and affordability significantly influence satisfaction, participation behaviour and behavioural intention in event and tourism settings. In the context of PESKON event, this suggests that even minor changes in perceived cost or value could substantially influence student participation levels.

The Place dimension also demonstrated a very strong relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.822$), highlighting the importance of the physical environment in shaping event experiences. This finding strongly supports servicescape theory (Bitner, 1992), which emphasises that environmental factors such as accessibility, layout and spatial design significantly influence user perceptions and behavioural outcomes. In practical terms, this suggests that a well-organised, easily accessible and navigable event space enhances convenience and reduces participation barriers, thereby increasing engagement. This result is consistent with Wakefield and Blodgett (1996), Lin (2016), and Dedeoğlu et al. (2018), who underscored the role of servicescape and environmental quality in enhancing visitor satisfaction and behavioural intention. The high correlation indicates that Place is not merely a logistical consideration, but a strategic factor in event design.

Similarly, the Product dimension showed a strong positive relationship with engagement ($r = 0.788$), confirming that the quality and attractiveness of event offerings are key drivers of student participation. This finding is in line with previous research highlighting that experiential quality significantly

influences satisfaction and behavioural intentions in event settings (Muskat et al., 2019; Pai et al., 2021). Recent studies by Jeong and Kim (2019) also reported that experiential value and event quality positively influence satisfaction, revisit intention and loyalty among event participants. The strong correlation suggests that students place considerable importance on the relevance, variety and quality of activities provided during the event. Thus, Product remains a core component of the overall engagement experience.

In contrast, the People dimension exhibited a moderate relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.644$), indicating that staff and volunteer interactions play a supportive rather than dominant role. While interpersonal interaction contributes to the overall event experience, its influence appears secondary compared to structural elements such as pricing and event quality. This finding is consistent with Ali et al. (2016), Rather (2021), and Rather and Hollebeek (2021), who highlighted that interpersonal interaction, emotional attachment and service engagement contribute positively to satisfaction and perceived value. The moderate correlation suggests that improving staff friendliness, responsiveness and communication can enhance the overall experience, but may not be sufficient to significantly increase participation without improvements in other key areas.

Finally, Promotion recorded the weakest relationship with student engagement ($r = 0.617$), despite being statistically significant. This finding suggests that while promotional efforts may successfully generate awareness, they are less effective in directly influencing engagement behaviour. This observation aligns with previous studies indicating that promotion primarily affects the cognitive stage of awareness rather than the behavioural stage of participation (Hudson et al., 2015; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Recent studies by Harrigan et al. (2021) further suggest that digital communication and social media engagement are important for increasing visibility and online interaction, although they may not necessarily guarantee actual participation behaviour. In the context of PESKON event, this may imply that students were aware of the event but were not sufficiently motivated to participate based solely on promotional messages. The relatively weaker correlation highlights the need for more targeted, engaging and value-oriented communication strategies that emphasise the unique benefits of participation rather than merely providing information.

Overall, the correlation findings suggest that student engagement in university events is predominantly driven by value-based (Price), environmental (Place) and experiential (Product) factors, while communication (Promotion) and interpersonal (People) elements serve as complementary influences. This hierarchy of influence provides important theoretical and practical insights, indicating that effective event management strategies must prioritise core value and experience dimensions while supporting them with appropriate promotional and service interaction efforts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships between marketing mix elements and student engagement in university events, focusing on the PESKON event at Universiti Utara Malaysia. The findings revealed that all five marketing mix dimensions namely Product, Price, Place, Promotion and People demonstrated significant positive relationships with student engagement. Among these dimensions, Price emerged as the strongest factor associated with engagement, followed by Place and Product, while Promotion showed the weakest relationship. The findings suggest that students place considerable importance on affordability, value-for-money, venue accessibility and the quality of event offerings when deciding to participate in university events. In contrast, promotional activities and staff interaction appear to function as supporting elements rather than primary determinants of engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to extending the marketing mix framework into higher education event contexts, which remain relatively underexplored in previous research. The study also supports the relevance of Expectation-Confirmation Theory and servicescape theory in explaining

engagement behaviour within university event environments. From a practical perspective, the findings provide important implications for university event organisers. Event organisers should prioritise affordable pricing strategies, improve venue accessibility and continuously enhance programme quality to strengthen student engagement. In addition, promotional strategies should focus on creating emotionally appealing and experience-oriented communication rather than merely disseminating information.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. The use of convenience sampling and the focus on a single university context may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research may expand this study by involving multiple universities, applying advanced analytical techniques such as regression or Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), and incorporating additional variables such as emotional experience, perceived value and event loyalty. In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence that marketing mix dimensions are significantly associated with student engagement in university events, with value, experience and environmental factors emerging as the most important dimensions influencing participation behaviour.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Sharif, N. M. conceptualized the study, collected and analysed the data, interpreted the findings, and drafted the manuscript. Ismail, A. contributed to the study design, manuscript review, and supervision. Nazari, N. M. contributed to data interpretation, manuscript revision, and editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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