The Effects of Educational Experiences on Marketing Students' Career Commitment: The Mediating Role of Professional Identity and the Moderating Role of Program Brand Reputation

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study develops a mechanism model to examine how educational experiences influence marketing students' career commitment, with particular attention to the mediating role of professional identity and the moderating role of program brand reputation. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey, yielding 352 valid responses. SPSS 22.0, PROCESS 4.1, and STATA 18 were used to conduct reliability and validity analyses, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and tests of mediation and moderation effects. The results indicate that Curriculum Experience (CE) has a significant positive effect on Career Commitment (CC) ($\beta = 0.365$, $p < 0.01$), and Professional Identity (PI) partially mediates this relationship (indirect effect $\beta = 0.231$, 95% CI [0.183, 0.283]). However, Practical Teaching Competence (PTC) has a significant negative effect on CC ($\beta = -0.090$, $p < 0.05$), whereas Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) does not have a significant effect ($p > 0.05$). Furthermore, Program Brand Reputation (PBR) does not significantly moderate the effects of the dimensions of educational experience on CC ($p > 0.05$). This study extends the theoretical application of SCCT and SDT to marketing education by revealing the differentiated effects of various dimensions of educational experience on career commitment and highlighting the key mediating role of professional identity. The findings also provide empirical evidence and practical implications for curriculum optimisation, practical teaching design, and program brand-building strategies in marketing education.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the global higher education landscape has undergone rapid transformation, with employability and career preparedness emerging as central concerns for business schools worldwide (Green et al., 2023; Frolova & Mahmood, 2025). According to projections by the World Economic Forum, marketing-related occupations are expected to undergo substantial changes in skill requirements by 2030, increasing pressure on higher education institutions to develop students who possess not only academic capabilities but also psychological commitment to their chosen careers (Zhou et al., 2025). However, despite the continued growth in enrollment in marketing programs, empirical evidence suggests a growing mismatch between students' educational experiences and their subsequent career commitment, with many graduates leaving the marketing field within three years or exhibiting relatively low levels of career attachment (Meyer et al., 1993; Carson & Bedeian, 1994; Edmondson & Matthews, 2021). Career commitment, defined as an individual's psychological attachment to a chosen career path and willingness to remain in that career, has been identified as a key predictor of long-term career success, job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Banerjee & Malik, 2026). In the context of marketing education, understanding the antecedents of career commitment is therefore critical for curriculum designers, career counsellors, and program administrators, as it can help improve students' retention in their chosen careers and enhance the return on educational investment (Woodall et

al., 2022; Herjanto et al., 2023).

Existing literature has identified several key factors influencing students' career commitment, including the curriculum design, teaching quality, and industry relevance of educational experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001; Yuksel et al., 2021; Edmondson & Matthews, 2021), Professional Identity (PI), particularly the extent to which students internalize their future professional roles (Mensah et al., 2021), and Program Brand Reputation (PBR), referring to the recognition and perceived value of an academic program among external stakeholders (Aaker, 1991; Qazi et al., 2022). However, three critical gaps remain in the existing literature.

First, although numerous studies have examined the direct effects of educational quality on student satisfaction and employability (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001; Estima & Duarte, 2021), relatively limited attention has been paid to the multidimensional nature of educational experiences in shaping career commitment. Specifically, Curriculum Experience (CE), Practical Teaching Competence (PTC), and Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) may operate through distinct psychological mechanisms and exert differential effects on students' career commitment. Further theoretical explanation and empirical investigation are therefore needed.

Second, the mediating role of Professional Identity (PI) in the relationship between educational experiences and career commitment has not been sufficiently theorised in the context of marketing education. Although PI has been extensively examined in nursing, teacher education, and health-related professions (Ho, 2025; Siddique et al., 2025; Xiong et al., 2025), its function in business education, particularly among marketing students, has received limited systematic empirical attention.

Third, the moderating role of Program Brand Reputation (PBR) has not been systematically examined. Although research on institutional branding has demonstrated that university reputation significantly influences students' choice behaviour and satisfaction (Lacap & Cortez, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024), whether program-level brand reputation strengthens or weakens the effects of educational experiences on career-related outcomes remains an open question.

To address these gaps, this study integrates Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994, 2002; Lent & Brown, 2019, 2020) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2021) to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework. SCCT provides a foundational framework for understanding how educational experiences shape career-related self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and ultimately career commitment. SDT complements this framework by explaining how Program Brand Reputation (PBR) may satisfy students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby influencing the process of professional identity formation.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

(1) Do Curriculum Experience (CE), Practical Teaching Competence (PTC), and Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) significantly enhance marketing students' Career Commitment (CC)?
(2) Does Professional Identity (PI) mediate the relationship between educational experiences and Career Commitment (CC)?
(3) Does Program Brand Reputation (PBR) moderate the effects of educational experiences on Career Commitment (CC)?

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending the application of SCCT and SDT to the context of marketing education by developing an integrated model that connects educational inputs, identity processes, and career outcomes. Methodologically, the study provides robust empirical evidence based on a large sample of marketing students and employs advanced mediation and moderation techniques. Practically, the findings offer actionable recommendations for business schools to strengthen students' Professional Identity (PI) and Career Commitment (CC) through curriculum innovation and program brand management.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

2.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994, 2002), is one of the most influential frameworks for understanding career development in higher education. Rooted in Bandura's (1986, 1997) Social Cognitive Theory, SCCT posits that career-related choices and persistence are shaped by the dynamic interplay among self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, personal goals, and environmental supports and barriers (Lent & Brown, 2013, 2019).

SCCT comprises three interrelated models: the interest model, the choice model, and the performance/persistence model (Lent & Brown, 2019, 2020). The performance/persistence model is particularly relevant to the present study because it explains how educational experiences influence career commitment through self-efficacy and outcome expectations. According to SCCT, when students are exposed to high-quality curriculum content, competent teaching practices, and positive industry signals, they are likely to develop stronger confidence in their capabilities (self-efficacy) and more favourable beliefs about the outcomes of pursuing a career in marketing (outcome expectations). These cognitive appraisals, in turn, facilitate the development of Professional Identity (PI) and Career Commitment (CC) (Lent et al., 2016, 2017).

Substantial empirical evidence supports the application of SCCT in educational contexts. Lee et al. (2015) provided longitudinal evidence that the SCCT academic persistence model effectively predicts retention among engineering students. Similarly, Le et al. (2023) demonstrated that self-efficacy and outcome expectations sequentially mediate the relationship between cultural values and entrepreneurial intentions. In marketing and business education, SCCT has been applied to understand entrepreneurial career development (Kuratko et al., 2021; Sampene et al., 2023) and career engagement (Hirschi et al., 2014). However, limited research has applied SCCT to explain how specific dimensions of educational experiences influence marketing students' Career Commitment (CC) through Professional Identity (PI).

2.2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2013, 2021), provides a complementary macro-level framework for understanding human motivation and personality development. SDT proposes that individuals have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, referring to the need to experience volition and self-endorsement; competence, referring to the need to feel effective and capable; and relatedness, referring to the need to feel connected to and cared for by others. The satisfaction of these three basic psychological needs is essential for promoting intrinsic motivation, the internalisation of extrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020).

In higher education, SDT has been widely applied to explain student engagement, academic achievement, and career development (Parenrengi et al., 2025). When educational environments support students' basic psychological needs through meaningful curriculum choices (autonomy), opportunities for skill development (competence), and a sense of belonging to a respected professional community (relatedness), students are more likely to develop a coherent Professional Identity (PI) and sustained Career Commitment (CC) (Zhou et al., 2019).

Program Brand Reputation (PBR) represents an important environmental factor within the SDT framework. A strong program brand signals to students that they belong to a prestigious and recognised community, thereby potentially satisfying their needs for relatedness and competence (Aaker, 1991; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). Conversely, when students perceive their program as lacking brand recognition, their basic psychological needs may be frustrated, potentially weakening the positive effects of educational experiences on identity formation and Career Commitment (CC) (Pitan & Muller, 2019; Jadric´et al., 2025).

2.3 Educational Experiences and Career Commitment

2.3.1 Curriculum Experience and Career Commitment

Curriculum Experience (CE) refers to students' perceptions of the quality, relevance, and intellectual challenge of academic courses (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). In marketing education, CE encompasses exposure to foundational theories, analytical tools, digital marketing competencies, and industry case studies. According to SCCT, well-designed curricula enhance students' self-efficacy by providing them with the knowledge and skills required to succeed in marketing careers (Lent et al., 2002, 2017).

Research in higher education consistently demonstrates that curriculum quality positively influences student satisfaction, learning engagement, and career preparedness (Green et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2025). In vocational and professional education, curriculum relevance has been shown to predict stronger professional identity and career intentions (Xiong et al., 2025). For marketing students, exposure to contemporary topics such as data analytics, consumer behaviour research, and integrated marketing communications may increase their confidence in pursuing careers in marketing.

H1a: Curriculum Experience (CE) has a positive effect on marketing students' Career Commitment (CC).

2.3.2 Practical Teaching Competence and Career Commitment

Practical Teaching Competence (PTC) refers to instructors' ability to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications through case-based learning, project-based assignments, guest lectures from industry professionals, and experiential teaching methods (Hölzner & Halberstadt, 2022; Hoti et al., 2024). From an SCCT perspective, competent teaching serves as an important source of vicarious learning and verbal persuasion, two key mechanisms through which self-efficacy beliefs are developed (Bandura & Wessels, 1997; Lent & Brown, 2013).

Empirical evidence indicates that high-quality practical teaching can significantly enhance students' professional identity and career motivation (Kercher et al., 2025; Su et al., 2026). In marketing education, instructors who bring industry experience into the classroom can help students visualise their future professional selves, thereby strengthening their Career Commitment (CC) (McDonnell et al., 2024).

H1b: Practical Teaching Competence (PTC) has a positive effect on marketing students' Career Commitment (CC).

2.3.3 Industry Prospect Perception and Career Commitment

Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) reflects students' beliefs regarding the future viability, prestige, and financial returns of marketing careers (Davidsson, 2015; Smith, 2023). SCCT posits that positive outcome expectations—beliefs regarding the favourable consequences of pursuing a particular career—constitute a powerful motivational force underlying career choice and persistence (Lent & Brown, 2019, 2020). When students perceive the marketing industry as a dynamic field characterised by growth opportunities and high social value, they are more likely to commit to pursuing a career in the field (Davies et al., 2025).

The relationship between industry perceptions and Career Commitment (CC) may be more complex than a simple linear association. Smith (2023) found that changes in marketing students' perceptions of employment opportunities in the industry directly influenced their career optimism, providing direct evidence for the context-dependent nature of IPP. Karakus et al. (2026) further revealed that industry-related information received by students through social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and WeChat, significantly shapes their career decisions and levels of satisfaction, suggesting that the formation of IPP is influenced by the information environment. However, overly optimistic industry expectations that are not matched by actual work experiences may result in disruptions to professional identity (Agboma & Govender, 2026) or produce a "reality shock," thereby weakening long-term Career Commitment (CC) (Demirtaş & Hatıpoğlu, 2025). In addition, Woodall et al. (2022) found that ident-

ifying as "a marketer" is at least as important as the behavioural dimension of "working in marketing," highlighting the underlying mechanism through which IPP may influence Career Commitment through an identity-based pathway. At the intervention level, Padgett and Donald (2023) demonstrated that targeted curriculum interventions can significantly enhance students' perceived employability, suggesting that IPP is malleable and can be strengthened through educational interventions. Based on the above theoretical rationale, this study proposes:

H1c: Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) has a positive effect on marketing students' Career Commitment (CC).

2.4 The Mediating Role of Professional Identity

Professional Identity (PI) is defined as an individual's self-perception as a member of a professional community, encompassing the values, norms, and behavioural expectations associated with a particular profession (Siddique et al., 2025). In higher education, the development of PI represents a critical developmental task through which students transition from outsiders to emerging professionals (Ho, 2025; Kryger & Qvortrup, 2025). Based on a survey of 433 university students in Australia and the United Kingdom, Tomlinson and Jackson (2021) identified PI as a "crucial bridge" connecting higher education with future employment, with the strength of PI formation significantly influencing students' familiarity with, proximity to, and confidence in their intended career fields.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a strong theoretical basis for the mediating role of PI. According to SCCT, environmental inputs, such as educational experiences, first influence individuals' self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, which subsequently shape the process of identity formation and ultimately influence career goals and commitment (Lent et al., 1994, 2016). Lent and Brown (2019) further argued that PI can strengthen students' self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations within their professional domains, thereby helping them reframe academic demands as developmental challenges. From a social cognitive perspective, PI provides individuals with a sense of direction and meaning in their career development and represents a core construct throughout the career development process. Empirical research across multiple disciplines has provided extensive support for this mediating pathway. In nursing education, PI has been shown to mediate the relationship between clinical internship experiences and career motivation (Xiong et al., 2026). In teacher education, PI mediates the effects of teacher training on teaching commitment (Zhang et al., 2024), as well as the relationship between motivational factors and commitment to the teaching profession. Su et al. (2026) further found that experiential learning influences students' career intentions through PI.

For marketing students, PI may develop through repeated exposure to marketing discourse, successful completion of marketing projects, and identification with marketing role models. Bennett (2010), based on a survey of marketing graduates, found that the development of a "marketing professional" identity during the early stages of a career is influenced by multiple factors, including corporate training practices, task characteristics, and individual attributes. Different forms of professional identity were also found to be significantly and positively associated with job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and intentions to remain in the profession. Karakus et al. (2026) further demonstrated that students' first-choice preference for their major, the integrated use of traditional and digital marketing tools, and exposure to institutional webpages and alumni blogs significantly influence their levels of Career Commitment (CC). Once established, a strong PI—reflected in the perception that "I am a marketer"—can provide cognitive and motivational scaffolding that helps sustain Career Commitment even in the face of setbacks (Oyserman, 2015). During the transition from the classroom to the workplace, students need to undergo a gradual transformation from a "business student identity" to a "professional identity," and this process of identity reconstruction has profound implications for their career preparedness.

Based on the theoretical and empirical foundations discussed above, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: Professional Identity (PI) has a positive effect on marketing students' Career Commitment (CC).

H3a: Professional Identity (PI) mediates the relationship between Curriculum Experience (CE) and Career Commitment (CC).

H3b: Professional Identity (PI) mediates the relationship between Practical Teaching Competence (PTC) and Career Commitment (CC).

H3c: Professional Identity (PI) mediates the relationship between Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) and Career Commitment (CC).

2.5 The Moderating Role of Program Brand Reputation

Program Brand Reputation (PBR) refers to the extent to which an academic program is recognised, respected, and valued by external stakeholders, including employers, alumni, and the broader society (Aaker, 1991; Jhantasana, 2023). In higher education, brand reputation serves as a signal of program quality and a source of social validation for students after enrollment (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001).

From an SDT perspective, PBR may satisfy students' basic psychological needs in three ways. First, enrollment in a highly reputable program may enhance students' sense of competence by affirming their intellectual capabilities. Second, a strong brand reputation may foster relatedness by connecting students with prestigious alumni networks and industry partners. Third, brand reputation may support autonomy by expanding students' perceived career opportunities and reducing pressure to conform to external expectations (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2021).

The moderating effect of brand reputation can be theorised from two competing perspectives. On the one hand, a strong PBR may amplify the positive effects of educational experiences on Career Commitment (CC), because students enrolled in highly reputable programs may be more likely to attribute their learning gains to program quality, thereby strengthening their Professional Identity (PI) (Zheng et al., 2024). On the other hand, a strong PBR may buffer or substitute for educational experiences, meaning that students in highly reputable programs may develop Career Commitment primarily through a brand halo effect rather than through their actual learning experiences (Lessa & Coelho, 2024).

Empirical evidence regarding the moderating role of institutional branding in career development remains mixed. In consumer behaviour and educational marketing research, brand reputation has been shown to influence student satisfaction, word-of-mouth intentions, and enrollment decisions (Vo et al., 2024). However, whether PBR moderates the psychological mechanisms linking educational experiences to Career Commitment (CC) remains insufficiently explored.

H4: Program Brand Reputation (PBR) moderates the effects of Curriculum Experience (CE), Practical Teaching Competence (PTC), and Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) on marketing students' Career Commitment (CC).

3. Data Sources and Analysis

3.1 Data Sources

This study employed a cross-sectional questionnaire survey design. Data were collected from March to May 2025 from students majoring in marketing at five higher education institutions. A convenience sampling method was adopted, and questionnaires were distributed through an online survey platform (Wenjuanxing). A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed. After excluding invalid responses, 352 valid questionnaires were retained, yielding a valid response rate of 92.6%.

3.2 Descriptive Analysis of the Sample

SPSS was used to conduct frequency analyses of the sample characteristics. Of the respondents, 114 were male (32.4%), and 238 were female (67.6%), indicating a relatively higher proportion of female respondents, which is consistent with the gender composition commonly observed among marketing students.

Regarding educational attainment, 177 respondents were undergraduate students (50.3%), 83 held a master's degree or higher (23.6%), 70 had a junior college education (19.9%), 14 had a high school or secondary vocational education (4.0%), and 8 had a junior high school education or below (2.3%). The age distribution was relatively balanced. The largest group comprised respondents aged 21–23 years (24.7%), followed by those aged 18–20 and 24–26 years, with 77 respondents in each group (21.9%). In addition, 56 respondents were aged 27–29 years (15.9%), while 55 were aged 30 years or older (15.6%). These characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Gender	352	1.676	0.469	1	2
Age Group	352	2.787	1.366	1	5
Educational Attainment	352	3.889	0.888	1	5
Curriculum Experience (CE)	352	3.157	0.998	1	5
Practical Teaching Competence (PTC)	352	3.223	0.984	1	5
Industry Prospect Perception (IPP)	352	3.165	0.990	1	5
Professional Identity (PI)	352	1.821	0.569	1	5
Career Commitment (CC)	352	3.006	0.764	1	5
Program Brand Reputation (PBR)	352	3.133	0.835	1	5

Note: N = sample size; SD = standard deviation; Min = minimum; Max = maximum.

3.3 Reliability Analysis

SPSS 22.0 was used to assess the reliability of each construct. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Reliability Analysis of the Constructs

Variable	Items	N	Cronbach's α
Curriculum Experience (CE)	3	352	0.742
Practical Teaching Competence (PTC)	3	352	0.721
Industry Prospect Perception (IPP)	3	352	0.740
Professional Identity (PI)	6	352	0.896
Career Commitment (CC)	4	352	0.907
Curriculum Experience (CE)	6	352	0.803
Overall Scale	25	352	0.777

To assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's α coefficients were calculated for each construct. In general, a Cronbach's α value greater than 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability, whereas a value of 0.80 or higher indicates good reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's α coefficients for all constructs exceeded 0.70, while the overall scale yielded a Cronbach's α of 0.777. These results indicate satisfactory internal consistency and provide a reliable basis for subsequent analyses.

3.4 Validity Analysis

Table 3-1 KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Test	Statistic
KMO	0.862
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: χ^2	4635.416
df	300
p	0.000

SPSS was used to assess the validity of the measurement scale. As shown in

Table 3-1, the KMO value was 0.862, indicating that the correlations among the variables were sufficiently strong for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 4635.416$, $df = 300$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the observed correlation matrix differed significantly from an identity matrix. These results demonstrate sufficient intercorrelations among the measured items and confirm the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

Table 3-2 Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalue	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	5.547	22.186	22.186
2	3.062	12.247	40.668
3	1.984	7.935	48.602
4	1.974	7.894	56.496
5	1.569	6.275	62.772
6	0.935	3.740	66.512
7	0.822	3.288	69.799
8	0.813	3.251	73.050
9	0.683	2.732	75.782
10	0.670	2.682	78.464

A Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess potential common method bias. As shown in Table 3-2, the first factor accounted for 22.186% of the total variance, which was below the commonly used 40% threshold, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to be a serious concern in the present study. The principal component analysis extracted five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. These five factors accounted for 22.186%, 12.247%, 7.935%, 7.894%, and 6.275% of the variance, respectively, with a cumulative variance explanation of 62.772%, exceeding the commonly accepted 50% threshold. Although the extracted five-factor structure did not completely correspond to the hypothesized six-factor structure, the five factors explained 62.772% of the total variance, indicating that they captured a substantial proportion of the in - formation contained in the original variables.

Table 3-3 Rotated Factor Loadings

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
CE 1					0.763
CE 2					0.770
CE 3					0.725
PTC 1				0.897	
PTC 2				0.722	
PTC 3				0.743	
IPP 1			0.892		
IPP 2			0.752		
IPP 3			0.770		
PI 1	0.91				
PI 2	0.767				
PI 3	0.724				
PI 4	0.774				
PI 5	0.746				
PI 6	0.752				
CC 1	0.731				
CC 2	0.774				
CC 3	0.834				

Table 3-3 Rotated Factor Loadings (continued)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
CC4	0.840				
PBR 1		0.922			
PBR 2		0.696			
PBR 3		0.658			
PBR 4		0.642			
PBR 5		0.659			
PBR 6		0.639			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA).

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

A Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization was performed to examine the correspondence between the extracted factors and the measurement items. Table 3-3 presents the factor loadings and the relationships between the extracted factors and the measurement items. All reported factor loadings exceeded 0.60, indicating relatively strong associations between the items and their respective factors. Although Professional Identity (PI) and Career Commitment (CC) loaded onto the same factor, the item-level factor loadings generally followed the theoretical expectations of the study. Overall, the results provide preliminary evidence that the adapted measurement instrument demonstrates satisfactory construct validity.

3.5 Correlation Analysis

To facilitate the analysis of the relationships among the study variables, the following abbreviations were used: CE for Curriculum Experience, PTC for Practical Teaching Competence, IPP for Industry Prospect Perception, PI for Professional Identity, CC for Career Commitment, and PBR for Program Brand Reputation. To provide preliminary empirical support for the hypotheses proposed in this study, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted using SPSS. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Pearson Correlations Among the Variables

	CE	PTC	IPP	PI	CC	PBR
CE	1					
PTC	-0.017	1				
IPP	0.082	-0.023	1			
PI	0.434**	-0.029	0.068	1		
CC	0.479**	-0.123*	0.063	0.774**	1	
PBR	0.023	-0.056	0.059	0.023	0.031	1

Note. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

The correlation analysis examined the relationships among the six study variables: Curriculum Experience (CE), Practical Teaching Competence (PTC), Industry Prospect Perception (IPP), Professional Identity (PI), Career Commitment (CC), and Program Brand Reputation (PBR). As shown in Table 4, CE was significantly and positively correlated with CC ($r = 0.479$, $p < 0.001$), whereas PTC was significantly and negatively correlated with CC ($r = -0.123$, $p = 0.020$). IPP was not significantly correlated with CC ($r = 0.063$, $p = 0.236$). PI was significantly and positively correlated with CC ($r = 0.774$, $p < 0.001$).

Overall, CE and PTC demonstrated significant associations with CC, while PI showed a strong positive association with CC, providing preliminary support for further regression analysis. In contrast, IPP was not significantly associated with CC, and therefore H1c was not supported.

3.6 Linear Regression Analysis

To further examine the relationships of Curriculum Experience (CE) and

Practical Teaching Competence (PTC) with Career Commitment (CC), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5-1 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Curriculum Experience and Practical Teaching Competence on Career Commitment

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	2.144	0.167	—	12.828	<0.001**	—	—
CE	0.365	0.036	0.477	10.231	<0.001**	1	1
PTC	-0.09	0.036	-0.116	-2.481	0.014*	1	1
R^2				0.242			
Adjusted R^2				0.238			
F				F(2,349)=55.853, p < 0.001			

Note. Dependent variable = Career Commitment (CC). *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. CE= Curriculum Experience, PTC= Practical Teaching Competence

Based on the results presented in Table 5-1, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with Curriculum Experience (CE) and Practical Teaching Competence (PTC) as the independent variables and Career Commitment (CC) as the dependent variable. The model yielded an R^2 of 0.242, indicating that CE and PTC jointly explained 24.2% of the variance in CC. The overall regression model was statistically significant, F = 55.853, p < 0.001, indicating that at least one of the two predictors was significantly associated with CC. A multicollinearity assessment showed that all VIF values were below 5, indicating no substantial multicollinearity among the predictors. The Durbin–Watson (DW) statistic was 2.112, which was close to the benchmark value of 2, suggesting no substantial residual autocorrelation and an acceptable model fit. The specific findings are as follows.

The regression coefficient for CE was 0.365 (t = 10.231, p < 0.001), indicating that CE had a significant positive effect on CC; therefore, H1a was supported. In contrast, PTC had a regression coefficient of −0.090 (t = −2.481, p = 0.014), indicating a significant negative effect on CC. This finding was opposite to the hypothesized direction; therefore, H1b was not supported. A comparison of the unstandardized regression coefficients showed that the coefficient for CE (0.365) was greater than that for PTC (−0.090), suggesting that CE had a stronger positive association with CC than PTC.

Table 5-2 Linear Regression Analysis of Professional Identity on Career Commitment

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.116	0.087	-	12.875	<0.001	-	-
Professional Identity (PI)	1.039	0.045	0.774	22.863	<0.001	1	1
R^2				0.599			
F				F(1,351)=522.724, p < 0.001			
DW				2.059			

Note. Dependent variable = Career Commitment (CC). *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. Professional Identity=PI

As shown in Table 5-2, a linear regression analysis was conducted with Professional Identity (PI) as the independent variable and Career Commitment (CC) as the dependent variable. The resulting regression equation was:CC = 1.116 + 1.039 × PI.The model yielded an R^2 of 0.599, indicating that PI explained 59.9% of the variance in CC. The overall regression model was statistically significant, F(1, 351) = 522.724, p < 0.001, indicating a significant association between PI and CC.

Specifically, PI had a regression coefficient of 1.039 (t = 22.863, p < 0.001), indicating that PI had a significant positive effect on CC. Therefore, H2 was supported.

3.7 Mediation Analysis

PROCESS v4.1 Model 4 was used to examine the mediating role of

Professional Identity (PI) in the relationships between Curriculum Experience (CE), Practical Teaching Competence (PTC), Industry Prospect Perception (IPP), and Career Commitment (CC). The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Mediating Effects of Professional Identity in the Relationships Between Educational Experiences and Career Commitment

Relationship	Path	β	SE	t	p	95% CI [LLCI, ULCI]
CE→PI→CC	CE→PI	0.247**	0.027	9.001	<0.001**	[0.193, 0.301]
	PI→CC	0.936**	0.049	19.154	<0.001**	[0.840, 1.032]
	Direct effect	0.135**	0.028	4.840	<0.001**	[0.080, 0.190]
	Indirect effect	0.231*	0.025	-	-	[0.183, 0.283]
	Total effect	0.366**	0.036	10.199	<0.001**	[0.296, 0.437]
PTC→PI→CC	PTC→PI	-0.016	0.031	-0.534	0.594	[-0.077, 0.044]
	PI→CC	1.035**	0.045	23.033	<0.001**	[0.946, 1.123]
	Direct effect	-0.079*	0.026	-3.032	0.003*	[-0.130, -0.028]
	Indirect effect	-0.017	0.020	—	=	[-0.095, 0.058]
	Total effect	-0.096*	0.041	-2.328	0.020*	[-0.177, -0.015]
IPP→PI→CC	IPP→PI	0.039	0.031	1.282	0.201	[-0.021, 0.100]
	PI→CC	1.038**	0.046	22.759	<0.001**	[0.948, 1.127]
	Direct effect	0.008	0.026	0.307	0.759	[-0.043, 0.060]
	Indirect effect	0.041	0.032	-	-	[-0.023, 0.101]
	Total effect	0.049	0.041	1.187	0.236	[-0.032, 0.130]

Note. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. Bootstrap method: percentile Bootstrap with 5,000 resamples.

The results in Table 6 show that the regression coefficient for the CE → PI path was significant and positive (β = 0.247, p < 0.001), indicating that CE positively predicted PI. The PI → CC path was also significant and positive (β = 0.936, p < 0.001). The direct effect of CE on CC remained significant (β = 0.135, p < 0.001). Moreover, the indirect effect was 0.231, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.183, 0.283], which did not include zero, indicating a significant indirect effect. Because the direct effect remained significant but was smaller than the total effect (0.366), PI partially mediated the relationship between CE and CC. Therefore, H3a was supported, indicating that PI plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between CE and CC.

For the PTC → PI pathway, the regression coefficient was not significant (β = −0.016, p = 0.594), indicating that PTC did not significantly predict PI. Although the PI → CC pathway was significant (β = 1.035, p < 0.001), the indirect effect was not significant (β = −0.017, 95% CI [−0.095, 0.058]), as the confidence interval included zero. Therefore, H3b was not supported, indicating that PI does not mediate the relationship between PTC and CC.

For the IPP → PI pathway, the regression coefficient was not significant (β = 0.039, p = 0.201), indicating that IPP did not significantly predict PI. Although the PI → CC pathway was significant (β = 1.038, p < 0.001), the indirect effect was not significant (β = 0.041, 95% CI [−0.023, 0.101]), as the confidence interval included zero. Therefore, H3c was not supported, indicating that PI does not mediate the relationship between IPP and CC.

3.8 Moderation Analysis

This study used STATA 18 to examine the moderating effects of Program Brand Reputation (PBR) on the relationships between Curriculum Experience (CE), Practical Teaching Competence (PTC), Industry Prospect Perception (IPP), and Career Commitment (CC). The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Moderating Effects of Program Brand Reputation on the Relationships Between Educational Experiences and Career Commitment (N = 352)

Variable	Coefficient	SE	t	p	95% CI
CE	0.348*	0.135	2.579	0.010*	[0.083, 0.614]
PTC	-0.131	0.138	-0.945	0.345	[-0.403, 0.141]
IPP	0.079	0.140	0.561	0.575	[-0.197, 0.355]
PBR	0.015	0.224	0.066	0.948	[-0.425, 0.454]
CE×PBR	0.005	0.042	0.114	0.909	[-0.078, 0.087]
PTC×PBR	0.013	0.042	0.317	0.751	[-0.069, 0.096]
IPP×PBR	-0.020	0.044	-0.464	0.643	[-0.107, 0.066]
R^2			0.2438		
Adjusted R^2			0.2284		
F			F (7,344) =15.84, p < 0.001		
Root MSE			0.6708		

Note. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

As shown in Table 7, the overall regression model was statistically significant, F (7, 344) = 15.84, p < 0.001, indicating that the model including CE, PTC, IPP, PBR, and their interaction terms significantly predicted CC. The model yielded an R^2 of 0.2438, indicating that the predictors jointly explained 24.38% of the variance in CC. The adjusted R^2 was 0.2284, indicating that the model explained approximately 22.84% of the variance after adjustment for the number of predictors. Overall, the model demonstrated an acceptable level of explanatory power.

The coefficient for CE was 0.348, with p = 0.010 < 0.05, indicating a significant positive association between CE and CC after controlling for the other variables. Specifically, higher levels of CE were associated with stronger CC. In contrast, the coefficient for PTC was −0.131 (p = 0.345 > 0.05), indicating that PTC was not significantly associated with CC in this model. Similarly, IPP had a coefficient of 0.079 (p = 0.575 > 0.05), indicating no significant association with CC. The coefficient for PBR was 0.015 (p = 0.948 > 0.05), suggesting that PBR itself did not have a significant main effect on CC.

Regarding the interaction effects, the coefficient for CE × PBR was 0.005 (p = 0.909 > 0.05), the coefficient for PTC × PBR was 0.013 (p = 0.751 > 0.05), and the coefficient for IPP × PBR was −0.020 (p = 0.643 > 0.05). All three interaction terms were statistically nonsignificant, indicating that PBR did not significantly moderate the effects of CE, PTC, or IPP on CC.

Overall, H4 was not supported. The results indicate that PBR did not significantly alter the strength or direction of the relationships between the three dimensions of educational experience and CC.

4. Discussion

4.1 Differential Effects of Educational Experiences on Career Commitment

This study first confirmed the significant positive effect of Curriculum Experience (CE) on marketing students' Career Commitment (CC) (H1a: β = 0.365, p < 0.01), which is consistent with the core logic of SCCT, namely, "environmental inputs → self-efficacy → career persistence" (Lent & Brown, 2013, 2019). In the context of marketing education, well-designed curricula provide students with industry-relevant knowledge, analytical tools, and case-based learning opportunities, thereby strengthening their confidence in their career-related capabilities and facilitating the development of CC. This finding is consistent with the longitudinal evidence reported by Lee et al. (2015) in engineering education, suggesting that the performance/persistence model of SCCT has considerable explanatory power across different academic disciplines.

However, PTC had a significant negative effect on CC (H1b: β = −0.090, p <

0.05), which runs counter to theoretical expectations. From the perspective of the literature on teacher stress and teaching quality, Vandenberghe and Huberman (1999) noted that teachers' work-related stress can affect not only their teaching performance directly but also learning outcomes indirectly by reducing student engagement. In marketing education, strong PTC may involve higher project requirements, more rigorous standards for case analysis, and more frequent classroom interaction. Although such intensive instructional practices may enhance students' practical skills, they may also increase academic demands and psychological burden. When students perceive practice-oriented teaching as involving "high demands" and "high difficulty," their CC may consequently be inhibited. This finding suggests that the value of teaching competence in disciplines such as marketing, which emphasise creativity and strategic thinking, is not necessarily uniformly positive; rather, its effects may depend on how students perceive and cope with instructional demands.

IPP did not have a significant effect on CC (H1c: $r = 0.063$, $p = 0.236$), challenging the presumed generalizability of the "outcome expectations → career persistence" pathway proposed by SCCT. SCCT posits that positive outcome expectations constitute a powerful motivational force for career choice and persistence (Lent & Brown, 2019, 2020). However, the present findings suggest that, for marketing students, perceptions of industry prospects may not constitute a key driver of CC. One possible explanation is that perceptions of the marketing industry's prospects are highly subjective and characterised by information asymmetry. Students may develop relatively vague perceptions of industry prospects through social media, industry reports, or information obtained from family and friends, but these perceptions may not necessarily translate into deep psychological attachment to the profession. By contrast, CE represents a more proximal factor that students can directly experience and evaluate, and its influence on CC may therefore be considerably stronger than that of IPP as a more distal factor. This finding suggests that the SCCT pathway whereby educational environmental inputs influence career persistence through cognitive appraisal may exhibit contextual specificity in marketing education. Different dimensions of educational experience may operate through substantially different psychological mechanisms, providing an important refinement of the boundary conditions for applying SCCT to business education.

4.2 The Mediating Mechanism of Professional Identity and Measurement Considerations

This study found that Professional Identity (PI) partially mediated the relationship between Curriculum Experience (CE) and Career Commitment (CC) (H3a), providing support for the SCCT pathway of "environmental inputs → identity formation → career goals." However, the mediating effects of PI on the relationships between Practical Teaching Competence (PTC) and CC (H3b), and between Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) and CC (H3c), were not supported. A closer examination suggests that the nonsignificant findings for H3b and H3c share a common underlying pattern with the unsupported H1b and H1c. In the present sample of marketing students, neither PTC nor IPP was significantly associated with CC or PI (PTC → PI: $r = -0.029$; IPP → PI: $r = 0.068$). This suggests that PTC and IPP may not represent key antecedents of PI formation among marketing students. By contrast, CE significantly predicted both PI and CC, making it the only dimension of educational experience that effectively connected educational inputs with career outcomes.

Notably, the validity analysis revealed a relatively high degree of overlap between the measurement indicators of PI and CC. Exploratory factor analysis showed that the six PI items and four CC items clustered on the same factor, with factor loadings ranging from 0.724 to 0.912 and from 0.731 to 0.840, respectively. The confirmatory factor analysis also indicated a relatively high correlation between the two latent constructs ($r \approx 0.77$). From the perspective of the construct-measurement literature, this discriminant validity concern is not unique to career psychology. Carson and Bedeian (1994), in developing a multidimensional measure of career commitment, noted that previous measures of career commitment often exhibited conceptual redundancy with constructs such as career identity. Similarly, London's (1983) career motivation theory conceptualised career identity as a core dimension of career commitment, sugg-

esting an inherent conceptual affinity between the two constructs.

Accordingly, the mediating effect identified in H3a should be interpreted as indicating that CE enhances CC by strengthening students' psychological attachment to the marketing profession, encompassing both professional identity and career commitment, rather than as a strictly causal mediation process involving two completely independent constructs. This interpretation does not diminish the theoretical significance of H3a. Rather, it suggests that, in the context of marketing education, PI and CC may jointly constitute a broader continuum of "career psychological attachment." This finding provides an important reference for future research seeking to operationalise and empirically distinguish these two closely related constructs in business education contexts.

4.3 The "Null Effect" of Program Brand Reputation as a Moderator

Program Brand Reputation (PBR) did not significantly moderate the effects of educational experiences on Career Commitment (CC) (H4), a finding that diverges from the theoretical expectations of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to SDT, a strong program brand should strengthen the positive effects of educational experiences on career outcomes by satisfying students' basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2021). However, in the present study, the correlations between PBR and CE, PTC, IPP, and CC were all close to zero (−0.056 to 0.059), and none of the three interaction terms reached statistical significance.

This "null finding" may be attributable to two possible explanations. First, the mechanism predicted by SDT— "program brand reputation → satisfaction of basic psychological needs → moderating effect" —may genuinely not operate in the present context. Amoozegar et al. (2025), in a study of graduate students in Vietnam, found that university reputation significantly influenced students' university-choice decisions, whereas the moderating effect of gender on this relationship was nonsignificant. This suggests that the absence of moderating effects is not unique to the present study but has also been observed in higher education research. Second, the relatively limited variation in PBR within the sample may have made it difficult to detect its moderating effect. In marketing education, students may perceive program brand reputation primarily as a "pre-enrollment screening signal" rather than as a "continuous source of influence" after enrollment. Once students enter a program, their actual educational experiences—particularly CE—may exert a substantially stronger influence on their career-related psychological attachment than the marginal effect of PBR.

This finding has direct implications for educational management practice. Marketing education institutions should allocate greater resources to building the brand of individual academic programs through curriculum quality and faculty influence, rather than relying primarily on the reputation of the institution.

5. Conclusion

Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study developed a mechanism model examining how educational experiences influence marketing students' Career Commitment (CC). The key findings can be summarised in three points. First, Curriculum Experience (CE) was a key educational input driving CC, with Professional Identity (PI) playing a partial mediating role in this relationship. Second, Practical Teaching Competence (PTC) and Industry Prospect Perception (IPP) did not operate as expected, suggesting that the applicability of SCCT in marketing education is context-specific. Third, the moderating effect of Program Brand Reputation (PBR) was not supported, indicating that students' career-related psychological development may depend more heavily on their individual learning experiences than on the halo effect of institutional or program-level brand reputation.

The main contribution of this study is to extend and delineate the boundary conditions of SCCT in business education while further clarifying the theoretical relationship between PI and CC as components of a broader "career psychol-

ogical attachment continuum." For marketing education institutions, priority should be given to optimising curriculum systems to strengthen students' career-related psychological attachment, while practical teaching should balance skill development with students' psychological capacity to cope with instructional demands.

The cross-sectional design and the concerns regarding the discriminant validity of PI and CC suggest that future research should employ longitudinal designs and behavioural indicators to further investigate the developmental mechanisms underlying students' career-related psychological attachment.

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