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Transcending The Classroom: University Marketing Clinic as A Training and Socially Responsible Strategy

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Abstract

University training in marketing faces the permanent challenge of articulating theoretical references with intervention in real contexts, in a scenario where the digitalization of markets and the complexity of business environments demand professionals capable of analyzing, deciding and communicating with social responsibility. This article presents the results of a quantitative descriptive study, developed with a sample of 82 students of the Marketing Program of the University of Nariño, from a universe of 367 enrolled in the Pasto and Ipiales campuses, with the purpose of diagnosing their perceptions about theory-practice integration and supporting the design of the University Marketing Clinic "MarketLab UDENAR". Data were collected using an online questionnaire of ten closed items, five of them on the Likert scale and five on the multiple choice scale, and were analyzed with basic descriptive statistics. The findings show a significant gap between the conceptual emphasis of the curriculum and the systematic opportunities for application, as well as an almost unanimous demand for the creation of a permanent institutional space for academic consulting in marketing. Based on these results, a theoretical-pedagogical model based on experiential learning, situated learning, authentic evaluation and university social responsibility is proposed, and the operational functioning of MarketLab UDENAR as a training and socially responsible strategy that articulates teaching, applied research and interaction with the regional environment is proposed.

Keywords: *Experiential Learning; University Social Responsibility; Marketing; University Practice; Higher Education.*

Introduction

In recent decades, higher education in economic and business areas has been challenged by the need to overcome models focused exclusively on the transmission of content and move towards pedagogical devices that articulate theory, practice and social commitment. In the specific field of marketing, this demand is exacerbated by the accelerated transformation of markets, the proliferation of digital platforms and the growing pressure to demonstrate the social and territorial relevance of university education. Various studies indicate that experiential learning and methodologies based on real problems are effective ways to strengthen the transfer of knowledge and the development of professional competencies in marketing and business.

In Latin America, the debate on university social responsibility has emphasized that higher education institutions cannot limit themselves to training technically competent professionals, but must responsibly manage their social, academic, and environmental impacts, articulating

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teaching, research, and interaction with the environment. The creation of stable spaces for university-society linkages is understood, in this framework, as a condition for giving social meaning to professional training and for co-producing knowledge with diverse territorial actors.

In this context, the Marketing Program of the University of Nariño offers a solid conceptual training, but faces the challenge of guaranteeing sustained opportunities for real application of the curricular contents. Although the curriculum incorporates the subject of Professional Practice in the last semester, this experience takes the form of a limited number of hours in a specific organization and does not ensure, by itself, a continuous articulation between theory and practice throughout the training path. A recent diagnosis, carried out with students from different levels and locations, revealed the perception of a gap between what was learned in the classroom and the demands of intervention in real problems of the environment, as well as an explicit demand for a permanent institutional space for marketing consulting at the service of the community.

The MarketLab UDENAR project arises precisely as a response to this problem. It is conceived as a university marketing clinic that, inspired by the tradition of legal clinics, seeks to offer supervised academic advice to entrepreneurs, small businesses and social organizations in the department of Nariño, while students develop diagnostic processes, strategic design and professional communication. The clinic is thus proposed as a pedagogical laboratory in which experiential learning, communities of practice and university social responsibility converge.

The objective of this article is to analyze the student perceptions about the theory-practice integration in the Marketing Program of the University of Nariño and, based on these results, to support a theoretical-pedagogical model and a proposal for operational operation for the MarketLab UDENAR University Marketing Clinic, understood as a training and socially responsible strategy. The structure of the text is organized in four moments. First, the theoretical-conceptual framework that articulates the approaches of experiential learning, situated learning, authentic assessment and university social responsibility is presented. Secondly, the methodology of the study is described, of a quantitative descriptive nature. Next, the results of the diagnosis applied to students from the Pasto and Ipiales campuses are presented and analyzed. Finally, the findings are discussed in dialogue with the specialized literature and the proposal of the clinic as a device for pedagogical innovation and university-environment interaction is presented.

Theoretical-conceptual framework

The design of a university marketing clinic requires placing it in a conceptual framework that allows it to be understood simultaneously as a pedagogical strategy, as a mechanism of territorial linkage and as an expression of university social responsibility. In this sense, the first unavoidable reference is Kolb's theory of experiential learning, who conceives learning as a cyclical process in which knowledge is generated from the transformation of experience through four articulated moments: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. From this perspective, the exposure of students to real market situations, accompanied by systematic processes of reflection and feedback, becomes a central axis for the consolidation of professional competencies in marketing.

Situated learning and the notion of communities of practice complement this view by emphasizing that knowledge is not constructed in isolation in the individual mind, but in specific

social contexts where subjects participate in shared activities and progress from peripheral positions to more central roles. In a university office, students are integrated into communities of practice in which they interact with teachers, classmates, and external actors, gradually assuming responsibilities of analysis, proposal, and communication in the face of specific marketing problems. This legitimate and supervised participation favors the appropriation of disciplinary knowledge and the construction of professional identities.

Authentic evaluation is another relevant pillar of the model. Unlike tests focused on the reproduction of content, authentic assessment is based on complex and contextualized tasks that emulate the demands of the professional world and allow the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes in meaningful actions to be assessed. Recent literature highlights that these forms of assessment promote the development of transferable competencies and improve employability by placing students in front of real problems and by requiring them to justify their decisions to different audiences. In a marketing office, products such as market diagnoses, positioning plans, communication strategies or branding proposals become privileged evidence of learning.

The university social responsibility (USR) approach brings an ethical and political dimension to this framework. From the Latin American proposals, USR is understood as a comprehensive impact management policy that commits the university to the evaluation and improvement of the social, environmental and academic consequences of its decisions and practices, in dialogue with the different stakeholders. University clinics, in this sense, not only fulfill a training function, but also operate as critical extension devices that allow the institution to contribute to the sustainable development of its environment through the transfer of specialized knowledge to actors who do not usually have access to professional services.

Finally, the literature on university-environment linkage insists on the need to build stable mechanisms for the co-production of knowledge between academia and territorial actors. Various studies show that traditional models of relationship, focused on specific extension activities, are insufficient to respond to contemporary challenges and propose alternative frameworks based on networks, long-term projects and spaces for sustained interaction. MarketLab UDENAR is part of this perspective by considering itself as a permanent academic consulting unit that articulates the Marketing program with the entrepreneurial and business fabric of the department of Nariño.

On these bases, the clinic is conceived as a pedagogical and social device in which experience, reflection, community of practice, authentic evaluation and social responsibility converge. Its purpose is to contribute to closing the theory-practice gap identified in the student diagnosis, while strengthening the commitment of the University of Nariño to regional development.

Method

The study that supports the consultation proposal was developed under a quantitative approach and a non-experimental, descriptive and longitudinal trendy design. This choice responded to the interest in characterizing, based on numerical data, the perceptions of the students of the Marketing Program regarding the integration of theory and practice, the existence of spaces for application and the relevance of a university marketing office, without intervening in the natural conditions of the training process.

The research was based on the socio-constructivist paradigm, as it assumed that student perceptions are not isolated opinions, but expressions of shared experiences in specific academic contexts. Although the information was processed using descriptive techniques, the interpretation of the results considered the meanings attributed by the students to their training trajectory and the opportunities for interaction with the environment.

The fieldwork was carried out in two successive moments, which allowed the experience of students from different locations and levels of progress in the curriculum to be captured. The first moment took place during the academic period 2024-B (July-December), with students from the Ipiales campus belonging to the even-numbered semesters (2, 4, 6, 8 and 10), enrolled in key subjects in the marketing area. The second moment took place in the 2025-A period (January-June), with students from the Pasto campus in the odd-numbered semesters (1, 3, 5, 7 and 9). In this way, a panoramic vision of the training trajectory was obtained, from the first approaches to the discipline to the most advanced levels of the curriculum. It is important to clarify that the Marketing Program at the University of Nariño is offered annually, in the first semester of each year.

The reference universe was made up of 367 students enrolled in the Marketing Program in the periods considered. From this universe, the sample size was calculated using the formula for finite populations, assuming a confidence level of 90%, a maximum allowable error of 8% and an expected response proportion of 50%, in the absence of previous studies. The result was a minimum case size of 81.85, rounded to 82 students, ensuring a reasonably accurate estimate of the perceptions diagnosed. The sample was obtained through a non-probabilistic sampling for convenience, based on voluntary participation and availability in the academic spaces where the instrument was disseminated.

The information collection technique was the self-administered online survey. A structured questionnaire of ten closed items was designed, hosted on an institutional digital platform. The first five questions used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", aimed at assessing the integration of theory and practice, opportunities for content application, the promotion of creative activities, and the presence of competencies for counseling and consulting. The remaining five questions were multiple-choice and explored the main difficulties in applying theory to practice, the types of spaces required to develop real experience, the perceived need for a legal-like practice, the priority services it should offer and the expected benefits for training.

The questionnaire was submitted to content review by professors in the marketing area, with experience in research and curriculum design, in order to ensure the clarity, relevance and coherence of the items with the objectives of the study. Student participation was anonymous and voluntary; The form included an informed consent section explaining the purpose of the research, the exclusively academic use of the data, and the guarantees of confidentiality.

The procedure for applying the instrument was carried out voluntarily and anonymously, guaranteeing the confidentiality of the information and the informed consent of the participants. The data collected were systematized and analyzed using descriptive statistics, using absolute and relative frequencies. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, the responses of the Likert scale were grouped into two analytical categories: disagreement/neutrality (grades 1 to 3) and agreement/acceptance (grades 4 and 5), a methodological strategy consistent with previous studies in higher education aimed at the analysis of student perceptions.

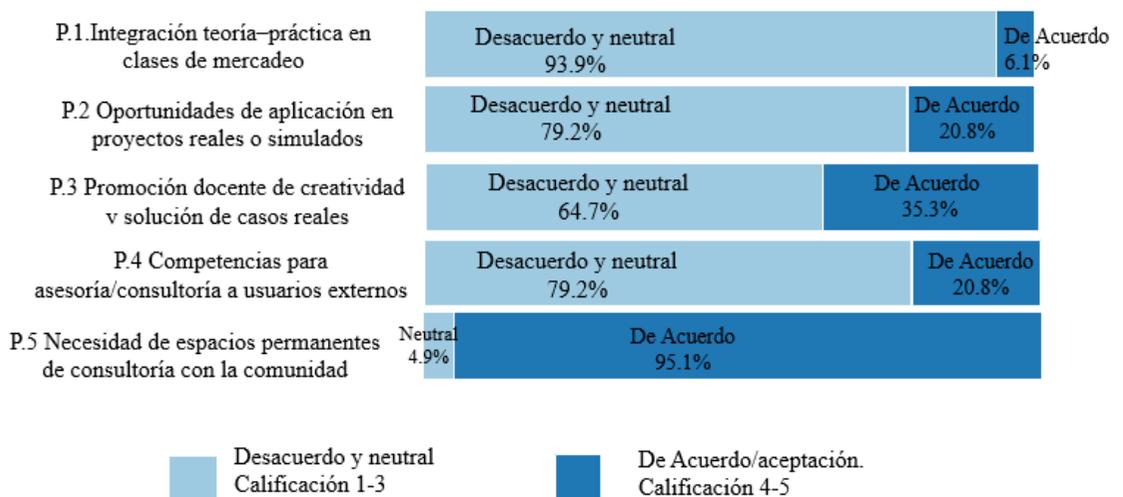
For the analysis of the information, descriptive statistical procedures were used. The Likert-type questions were processed by calculating relative frequencies and percentages by response category, which allowed identifying trends of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The multiple-choice questions were analyzed based on the percentage distribution of the selected alternatives, with emphasis on the identification of the predominant option in each case. These results were interpreted in the light of the theoretical-conceptual framework, with the purpose of supporting the design of the pedagogical model and the operational functioning of the MarketLab UDENAR clinic.

Results

The analysis of the results is structured in two interpretative blocks, according to the nature of the instrument applied. First, the findings associated with the Likert scale questions are presented, aimed at identifying the student perception of theory-practice integration and applied training in the Marketing Program. Secondly, the multiple-choice questions are analyzed, which allow us to delve into the difficulties, needs and expectations of the students in the implementation of a University Marketing Clinic.

In relation to questions 1 to 5, the aggregate results show a critical perception of the current processes of practical training, particularly with regard to the integration between theoretical content and its application in real contexts. As can be seen in Figure No. 1, corresponding to the grouping of grades 1–3 (strongly disagree, disagree, and neutral) versus grades 4–5 (agree and strongly agree), most students show high levels of disagreement or neutrality in four of the five items assessed.

1. Student Perception Marketing Program 2024–2025

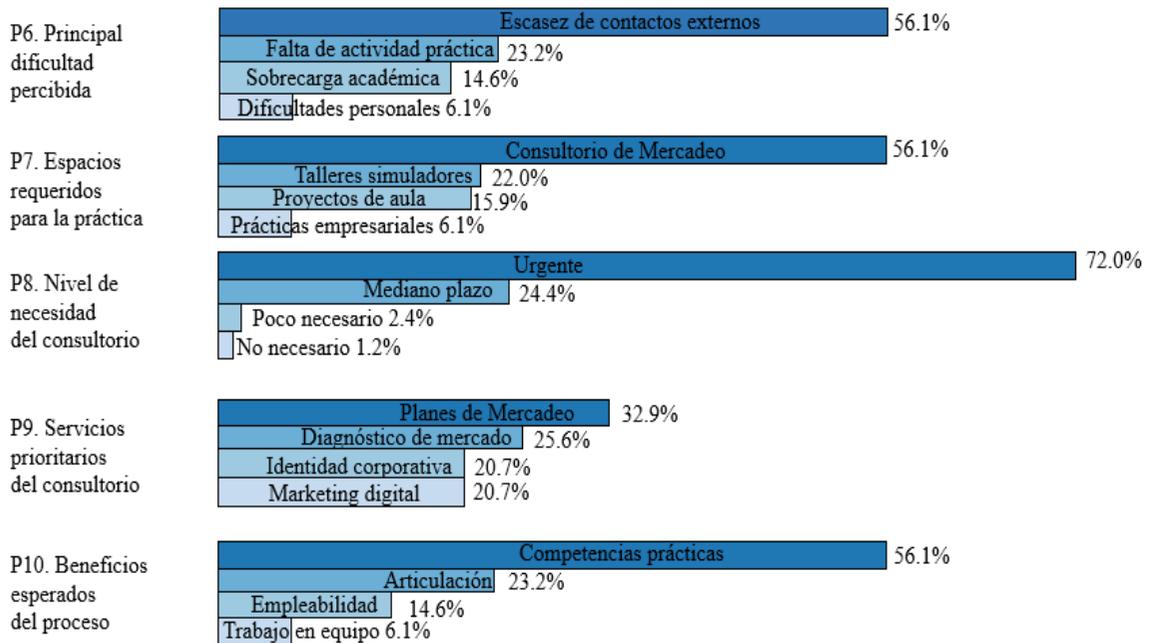


Specifically, in the question related to the integration between theory and practice in marketing classes, about 94% of students are placed in the categories of disagreement or neutrality, which suggests a generalized perception of inadequacy in the spaces of practical application within the classroom. A similar behavior is observed in the questions associated with opportunities to apply knowledge in real or simulated projects, as well as in the strengthening of competencies for advice and consulting to external users, where more than 79% of the answers are concentrated in the categories of low or intermediate grade. In the case of the promotion of creativity and the solution of real cases by teachers, although there is a slight improvement, approximately 65% of students maintain a position of disagreement or neutrality, which shows a persistent gap between the formative intention and the perceived experience.

In contrast to these results, the question referring to the need to have permanent institutional spaces for consulting with community interaction presents a clearly differentiated behavior. In this item, more than 95% of the students are located in the categories of agreement or total agreement, which confirms a broad consensus on the relevance of creating formal scenarios of applied practice that articulate academic training with the real demands of the social and productive environment.

The second block of results corresponds to questions 6 to 10, which directly explore the main perceived difficulties, the training spaces required, the level of need for the clinic, the priority services and the expected benefits for the professional training process. Figure No. 2 shows the distribution of the answers, organized by option and ordered according to their predominance, which facilitates a comparative reading between the different items.

2. Student perceptions about difficulties, needs and benefits of the internship in Marketing



Regarding the difficulties in applying marketing theory to practice, the option most pointed out by students corresponds to the lack of contact with companies, entrepreneurs or real market situations, with a participation of more than 56%. This result reinforces the perception previously identified in the Likert scale questions, evidencing that the main limitation does not lie only in the academic load or personal factors, but in the absence of structured scenarios of interaction with the external environment.

Regarding the spaces considered necessary to develop practical experience within the university, the option that concentrates the highest percentage of responses is the creation of a permanent University Marketing Clinic, aimed at the attention and advice of real cases. This preference far exceeds other alternatives such as classroom projects with invited companies, mandatory business internships or the use of workshops and simulators, which highlights the student appreciation of a stable, continuous institutional space with social impact.

In line with the above, when inquiring about the level of need to implement a clinic of these characteristics, the majority of students consider it necessary and urgent, while a smaller proportion perceive it as a pertinent initiative in the medium term. Options that minimize or discard the need for the clinic register marginal percentages, which reinforces the academic and social legitimacy of the proposal.

In relation to the services that should be offered as a priority by the practice, the results show a relatively balanced distribution between market diagnosis, the formulation of marketing plans and positioning strategies, as well as digital marketing. This diversity of preferences suggests that the clinic should not be limited to a single line of intervention, but should be configured as an integral space that responds to multiple needs of the business and community environment.

Finally, the benefits expected by students are mainly concentrated in the development of practical skills in marketing, such as analysis, decision-making and solving real problems, followed by the possibility of improving employability and strengthening the resume at the time of graduation. These results confirm that the implementation of the University Marketing Clinic not only responds to an immediate academic need, but is also projected as a strategy with a direct impact on the professional trajectory and social responsibility of the university.

Discussion

The results obtained show a structural gap between the theoretical training provided in the Marketing Program and the effective opportunities for practical application perceived by the students. In particular, the findings associated with Figure 1 show that a large proportion of the respondents are at levels of disagreement or neutrality with regard to the integration of theory and practice, the application of knowledge in real projects, the promotion of problem-oriented creativity and the development of competencies for advising external users. This trend confirms that, although the curriculum contemplates solid conceptual content, this knowledge is not always translated into situated training experiences, nor into real contexts of intervention, which coincides with what is indicated by the literature on experiential learning and education based on professional practice.

In contrast, Figure 1 reveals a practically unanimous consensus regarding the need to have permanent institutional spaces for interaction with the community for the provision of marketing

consulting services. This result is especially relevant, since it suggests that students not only recognize the current limitations of the training process, but also clearly identify a structured alternative to overcome them. In this sense, the demand for a university marketing clinic is configured as a training response consistent with the principles of university social responsibility, insofar as it articulates academic training with the real needs of the socio-business environment.

On the other hand, the results synthesized in Figure 2 delve into the nature of student difficulties and expectations, allowing a more precise understanding of the factors that support the relevance of the University Marketing Clinic. The main difficulty identified is related to the lack of contact with companies, entrepreneurs and real market situations, which reinforces the idea that the limitations are not only due to individual shortcomings, but also to the absence of institutional mechanisms that facilitate systematic linkage with the productive context. This finding is consistent with previous studies that highlight the need for authentic learning environments for the development of professional competencies in applied areas such as marketing.

In addition, the majority preference for a permanent university marketing clinic as a priority training space, over other alternatives such as workshops, simulators or isolated practices, highlights the value of continuous and structured pedagogical models. This result suggests that students perceive the clinic not only as a practice scenario, but as an integrating environment where learning, teacher accompaniment and social responsibility converge, which reinforces its potential as a sustainable pedagogical innovation strategy.

In relation to the level of perceived need, the data show that the creation of the clinic is considered urgent by a large majority of the participants, which confirms the temporal relevance of the proposal and its alignment with current training expectations. Likewise, the prioritization of services such as market diagnosis, the formulation of marketing plans, digital marketing and corporate identity design shows a clear orientation towards real problems of the local business environment, especially entrepreneurs and small organizations, which strengthens the socially responsible nature of the proposed model.

Finally, the expected benefits associated with the clinic, mainly focused on the development of practical skills, articulation with professional practices and degree projects, and the strengthening of employability, allow us to interpret the University Marketing Clinic as an effective bridge between academic training and professional insertion. In this sense, the results support the hypothesis raised in the study and position the UDENAR MarketLab as a relevant pedagogical strategy to transcend the classroom, impact the environment and consolidate socially responsible marketing training, consistent with the contemporary demands of higher education.

Conclusions

The results of the study allow us to conclude that there is a structural gap between the theoretical training provided in the Marketing Program and the effective opportunities for practical application of knowledge in real contexts, a perception that is consistently manifested in most of the students surveyed. This situation does not respond to the total absence of applied training strategies, but to their fragmented, punctual and concentrated nature in advanced stages of the curriculum, which limits the progressive consolidation of professional skills throughout the training process.

Likewise, there is evidence of a high student acceptance of the creation of a University Marketing Clinic as a permanent pedagogical strategy, conceived not only as a space for experiential learning, but as a mechanism for systematic interaction with the socio-business environment. The marked positive assessment of this proposal confirms that students recognize the need for institutional scenarios that integrate teaching, practice and social responsibility, allowing the development of analytical, communicative and advisory skills in real market situations.

Similarly, the findings related to the main perceived difficulties in applying theory to practice, especially the lack of contact with companies and real problems, reinforce the relevance of training models based on early linkage with external actors. In this sense, the University Marketing Clinic is projected as an alternative that contributes to reducing this gap, by facilitating contextualized learning processes aimed at solving the specific needs of the territory.

Finally, the study allows us to affirm that the implementation of a pedagogical-operational model such as the UDENAR MarketLab constitutes a strategic opportunity to strengthen the quality of marketing training, expand the social projection of the university and consolidate its commitment to local development. From this perspective, the clinic is configured as an academic device that transcends the classroom, articulates knowledge with socially responsible practices and contributes to the training of professionals with greater capacity for intervention, social relevance and sensitivity to the dynamics of the environment.

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